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The Caravan and the Temple and Songs of the Pilgrims.

Rev. E. J. Robinson.


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THE CARAVAN AND THE TEMPLE,

AND

SONGS OF THE PILGRIMS.

THE

CARAVAN AND THE TEMPLE,

AND

Songs of the Pilgrims.

PSALMS CXX.—CXXXIV.

BY

EDWARD JEWITT ROBINSON.

"I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday."—PSALM xlii. 4.

"My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto Thee; and my soul, which Thou hast redeemed."—PSALM lxxi. 23.

"Be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."—EPHES v. 18, 19.

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PREFACE.

KEBLE thought, and, in the opinion of Archbishop Howley, proved, it impossible to translate the Psalms. The writer does not attempt a close translation of those which he examines, but would humbly join the company of faithful interpreters. His aim is to demonstrate the Gospel of Christ in the Songs of Degrees, and show wherein the experience of ancient saints was like that of God's servants now, and will continue to typify the lot of His people. He offers his paraphrases and essays to the consideration of the pious and devout, not without first laying them at the feet of his Divine Master, imploring Him to bless them to the encouragement and guidance of Christian pilgrims.

August 7th, 1878.

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THE CARAVAN AND THE TEMPLE, AND SONGS OF THE PILGRIMS.

PRELUDE.

"Ye shall have a song, as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept;
And gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe
To come into the mountain of the 'LORD, to the Mighty One of Israel."—ISAIAH xxx. 29.

A HYMN-BOOK is commonly a selection from authors of different times and denominations. In it, next to the work of a living poet, is that of an early father. The hymn on one page was written by an anchorite in his cell; that opposite by a prelate in his palace. One composed by an itinerant on horseback, is followed by the production of a scholar in his study, or an artisan in his workshop. The latest edition contains an original collection, and hymns subsequently interspersed or added. Care is required in using the volume, that its words may be repeated in season. Most of the pieces are suitable for united worship, but not in all circumstances and on every occasion. There are sacred ballads for revival meetings, solemn songs for regular congregations, and psalms for religious festivals. A few are not intended for public services. Some are appropriate for the family only, others for the closet, some for a journey, some for the sick room,

some for the marriage, some for the funeral. There are hymns for masters and servants, parents and children.

The Book of Psalms is similarly constructed. The origin, selection and arrangement of its contents were under Divine inspiration: still the ancient and permanent Hymn-Book of the Universal Church is the work of bards and editors from Moses to Ezra. It consists of five books, which appear to have been separately prepared and used, each containing compositions by ready writers and sweet singers of various places, times and orders. There are psalms for kings and subjects, householders and pilgrims, the caravan and the temple; psalms of penitence, prayer and praise; didactic, historic and prophetic psalms; and, in the middle of the last book, fifteen of mixed character and different dates, entitled Songs of Degrees, or of the Ascents or Goings-up.

How came the one hundred and twentieth and fourteen following psalms to be put together, and to receive their distinctive title? It has been suggested that they were thus called from peculiarity in rhythm; but perhaps in this respect some of them might with as much correctness be described as songs of the goings-down. The opinion is equally doubtful that the heading was given them because, when they were chanted, the volume of voice and music gradually ascended. As much might be safely conjectured of many other psalms. It is not less a flight of fancy to explain the title as meaning Songs of the Steps, attaching the fifteen songs to the flight of fifteen steps in the Temple which led up from the common court to that of the priests; there being no evidence that the Levites were accustomed, in the great festivals, as they mounted from court to court, to halt on every step while singing, with the accompaniment of the flute, that song of the fifteen which corresponded with it in number; or no proof that the stair existed before the time of Herod. Nor

can the allusion be to the carrying up of the ark to the tabernacle prepared for it by David; for the authors of half of the Songs of Degrees were not then born. Some conclude that these psalms were composed when the Jews went up from Babylon to their own country. (Ezra vii. 9). It is not a sufficient objection to this view, that they are not called songs of the *going*-up, but of the *goings*-up, inasmuch as there were more ascents than one from Babylon to Jerusalem after the seventy years' captivity; and there is no need to question that some of them were originated by circumstances of the return. But we take it that what the emancipation and its incidents suggested was, not more the composition of new songs than the adoption or adaptation of well-known hymns that had long been popular, and were suitable to the case of the returning Israelites. The words of Isaiah, written nearly two hundred years before the liberation of the exiles, imply that lyric poems to be used in visits to the Temple existed in great number. "Ye shall have a song, as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to come into the mountain of the Lord, to the Mighty One of Israel."

From every part of the country, the faithful went to Jerusalem three times a year, to attend the annual festivals, of unleavened bread, of weeks and of tabernacles; and we may gather from the language of Scripture that, as we speak of going up to London or up to the May Meetings, those pilgrimages were called goings-up. God said by Moses: "I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt *go up* to appear before the Lord thy God thrice in the year" (Exod. xxxiv. 24). And David says, in a psalm included in the Songs of Degrees: "Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together: whither the tribes *go up*, the tribes

of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord" (Psalm cxxii. 3, 4). Only the *sons* of Israel must of necessity go up; but many a Hannah followed her Elkanah, many a Mary accompanied her Joseph. Having to pitch their tents night after night at a distance from the centres of population, it was important for friends and neighbours to travel together in strong companies. People fond as the Israelites were of music would not leave all their sweet instruments at home, nor march any distance without a song; and religious pilgrims, journeying to and from their national temple, would prefer sacred to other melodies. As the caravan moved across the valley, over the water, through the green wood, up the steep hill, a solitary voice rose from it; then a lonely pipe was playing; a few of the travellers joined in the swelling song; and soon there was a general chorus. What more natural than that some literary man, spontaneously or by request, or some sage committee, should make a selection from the favourite songs, all of which could not be equally worthy of repetition and preservation? Fifteen were chosen; and, we may believe, scribes could not copy faster than the work was in demand. God directed the choice, and has preserved the Songs of Degrees for the use and edification of His Church to the end of time.

It is not very difficult to see how appropriate were these select songs for the pilgrimages to Jerusalem. Patriotic, short and pithy, with key-words and catch-words, they were easy to remember, and pleasant to repeat. Plaintive and low sometimes, blending with the thoughts of the aged and the sighs of the feeble and weary, they were as frequently lively and buoyant, tying the bounding youth to the slow pace of the caravan. Depicting domestic scenes, they brought to mind the dear ones left at home in the fatherly

care of Jehovah. They contained sweet allusions to David's piety, and the immortal harp he had tuned for the tribes on Mount Zion, and to Solomon's magnificent and tranquil reign. They told of the beauty of the city, the splendour of the Temple, and the glad solemnities of the festival to which the pilgrims were going, or from which they were returning. Songs of defiance and triumph they were, of faith, hope and charity, of gratitude and joy, declaring the mighty deeds, watchful protection, bountiful providence and redeeming mercy of the Lord. Who, they demanded, could injure the servants of Him Who had saved His people from their Egyptian, Arabian, Philistine, Babylonian and Samaritan foes? The songs of the pilgrims encouraged and strengthened them to persevere in the roughest places and against the greatest dangers.

There may be a trace of arrangement in this Psalter within the Psalter, this paradise within the paradise, as the Songs of Degrees have been called; but it is hard, if not impossible, to find the thread. Both the escape from Babylon and the annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem have been laboriously remembered in pretended descriptions and explanations not more ingenious and pretty than manifestly forced and unreal. The flowers in this garden are not disposed in ribbon-like order. The birds of this paradise sing in trees, not in cages. There is as much difference in subject-matter and style as in authorship. In the middle is an ode by Solomon; in each wing there are two by David; and the rest are by other poets. The collection was no more intended than is Wesley's or Sankey's to be always begun at the beginning, and chanted through to the end. One song was started, and then another, on the way to Zion, within the gates of the city, and in the return journey, as suggested by remembered words, recurring airs, or local as-

sociations. Sing which of them you please, says the "Little Psalter," as it has also been called; but sing these songs.

They are for the true Israel in all dispensations. Christians are pilgrims, mocked by some and cheered by others, as they set out on their heavenward journey, and proceed in its successive stages; and they are bolder against their enemies, and more happy with their friends, the more earnestly they lift up their voices in sacred song. The sands they cross on the changing way are loose or firm, the rocks smooth or rough, the fords deep or shallow, according to their faith, which often strengthens itself exceedingly by the use of psalms and hymns. It may not be impossible to accomplish the goings-up of the Christian pilgrimage without singing; but how strange that there are any who try to do so! How wonderful that there are those who deem devotional singing unnecessary and even improper, when it is assumed to be a religious duty, and instructions are given respecting it, in the Apostolic Epistles; when they read that "at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God; and the prisoners heard them" (Acts xvi. 25); when it is on record that the Lord Jesus and His disciples "sung an hymn" (Matt. xxvi. 30); when they find the Psalter in the middle of the inspired volume in which they look for their rule of worship; when from the central choir in the temple of Scripture bursts the exulting statement, "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto Thy name, O Most High" (Psalm xcii. 1); "Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage" (Psalm cxix. 54).

Religion is progressive, like the course of the bird, a continual ascent and an improving song. "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. iv. 18). The gradual psalms are a

ladder reaching to heaven, like Jacob's, attractive and safe from the earth because of many ministering angels, and brighter and brighter to the top in the nearer radiance of Him Who graciously looks down and blesses His ascending saints. Each in the series, said a Jewish comment, is a "song on the steps on which God leads the righteous up to a happy hereafter." Step helping to step, let the good pilgrims persevere till they "come to Zion with songs," and enter the eternal temple.

Songs of the Ascents these are, as aids in the goings-up of worship. A good hymn is wings to the soul; and the saint is a living psalm-book. The child of God often feels, when singing choice words, that his Father's hand is helping him higher. Not only on the long journey to the feast and back were the Israelites "singing pilgrims:" they delighted in their sacred songs along the road and in Jerusalem, because they loved them at home. Hymns are for use in domestic and private devotion, as well as public services. See "an Israelite indeed" alone with the scroll of the Pilgrim's Psalter open before him; and listen to him, softly chanting the Divine sentences for joy and profit under his own vine and fig-tree. So Nathanael prepares for his next visit to the Temple, and, without meaning it, qualifies himself to be openly blessed by the Saviour, and learns to be made a blessing. They are to be envied who, without company, can soar, like the lark from the ground, on the wings of thankful and prayerful song. The biographer of Bishop Bull says that "singing the praises of God made a part of his spiritual exercises in his retirement, which he chose to celebrate in the words of the Royal Psalmist, as translated into metre for that purpose." To the late Luke Wiseman, as we gathered from an impressive statement he made in the pulpit, singing a hymn, when he had entered

his study, and shut out the world, and yet seemed unready for devotion, was like calling on the observant Lord Whose face he was seeking, and to Whose footstool he fain would be climbing, and often brought him as if at a bound into the Father's presence. Alone with God, if ever you find yourself unable to pray or praise, raise your voice thoughtfully in a proper psalm, and your refreshed spirit will rise, and you will catch the inspiration of worship.

To sing truly is to mean what is sung. Sound without sense is nonsense. They degrade themselves to the level of the machine who make up-and-down noise without intelligent pronunciation and stress of words. What we sing is a more serious consideration than how we sing. Not only tune the pipe and modulate the voice, but study the psalm. Speak forth the written words, and make them as much as they are intended to be in your "degrees" your own. As the world treats you, it treated David, Solomon and the other pilgrim bards; and they play and chant for you, the more agreeably to teach you, not only how, but chiefly what, in like circumstances, you should say and sing yourselves. The psalm-book is a looking-glass for you. In its writers, and the saints of whom they write, you may see yourself, and your experience and duty. Behold them at home, in the street, in the temple, in profound distress, in bitter conflict, looking to God, trusting in His mercy, waiting for His interposition, and triumphing in His salvation; and not merely resemble them in situation and want, but, so far as they set you a good example, in disposition, language, meaning and behaviour.

Nothing can be fitter than this scroll of songs for the pilgrim to carry in his bosom, as he flies from Destruction, and aims at the Heavenly City. There is no stage in his progress in which it will not supply his heart and lips with

appropriate thought and expression. Would flesh and blood call him back, or lead him astray? He reads in his book, "Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue" (cxx. 2); "Have mercy upon us: for we are exceedingly filled with contempt" (cxxiii. 3). Is he in the slough of despond, missing his footing, sinking in the mire? He keeps his face in the right direction, as he repeats, "Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord. . . . I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in His word do I hope" (cxxx. 1, 5). Does he reach the foot of the cross? His burden falls from his back, while he uses the language, "If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared" (cxxx. 3, 4). Is the hill of difficulty in his way? He turns neither to the right nor the left, but goes up, saying, "Our help is in the name of the Lord, Who made heaven and earth" (cxxiv. 8). Is he joined by faithful and hopeful travellers, who keep by his side, conversing agreeably and profitably? "Behold," says his song, "how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (cxxxiii. 1). Is there some beautiful palace, from which he is favoured with a view of Emmanuel's land, and of delectable mountains over which he is expecting to travel? He encourages himself in the Lord, exclaiming, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills: from whence cometh my help?" (cxxi. 1). Are there lions to pass? Is there beneath his feet a slippery and dangerous descent? Does Apollyon approach him with flaming terrors? Are temptation and persecution encountered in Vanity Fair? He reads and sings, "He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: He that keepeth thee will not slumber. . . . The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: He shall preserve thy soul" (cxxi. 3, 7). "Blessed be the Lord, Who hath

not given us as a prey to their teeth. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped" (cxxiv. 6, 7). First from the delightful hills through a glass distantly and darkly, and then nearly and clearly with the naked eye from the sweet land of Beulah, does he get sight of the Celestial City? With rapture he utters the song, "Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem" (cxxii. 2).

The Songs of Degrees may be recommended to the serious of every class. If there is darkness over the land, even darkness that may be felt, they who love and use these odes have light in their dwellings. When mists of thought and care have put the Lord out of sight and remembrance, find your way into this garden of the soul, and you are in His manifested presence, arrested or supported by His gracious hand, speaking to Him, hearing what He says, reproved by His frown, or comforted by His smile. Let the healthy and prosperous study these songs, and they see that every good they possess is from the Lord, and that they must be humble, thankful and benevolent. They are especially for the poor in spirit. The very expression of grief at first, they give a true voice to the troubled, and at length teach them the language of trust and triumph. More may be said than, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted:" we may say it is good for us that others have been in tribulation. We owe the songs of the pilgrims to their sorrows; and we may be indebted to their hymns for joys. They trusted in God, and were delivered; and they show us the way of salvation. Hearing and following their voices, as they change from distress to confidence, and rise from hope to exultation, we come after them out of the wood, and shout with them for victory and gladness, "Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance" (Psalm xxxii. 7).

A good habit, in taking up a book, is praying. Prayer soon tells us whether it is a fit work to peruse, and, if so, bringing light from heaven on page after page, is an excellent help in reading it to advantage. Prayer allows us to study the Songs of Degrees. Proceeding to do so, let us ask for grace to check or prompt us, that we may sufficiently understand and duly apply or appropriate the sacred verses, and that we may not go too carelessly and fast, but with a firm hold and footing in every degree ascend from the lowest step to the highest. Singing is the rapture of prayer. They sing best who pray best. The life of the Pilgrim's Psalter is prayer; and if we begin in this spirit we shall finish with praise.

I.

MESECH AND KEDAR.

"1. In my distress I cried unto the LORD,
And He heard me.
2. Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips,
And from a deceitful tongue.
3. What shall be given unto thee?
Or what shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue?
4. Sharp arrows of the mighty,
With coals of juniper.
5. Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech,
That I dwell in the tents of Kedar!
6. My soul hath long dwelt
With him that hateth peace.
7. I am for peace: but when I speak,
They are for war."

—PSALM CXX.

THE Psalms are not words pressed into the service of metre and music, without any natural spirit and sequence. When the Church would tell its tale, or the saint would sing his story, present distress bursts into expression by reference to past adversity. This is not the first time I have suffered. I obtained deliverance before; and I know how to get it again. The Lord saved me then, when I prayed, and I will pray to Him, that He may save me now. Prayer is offered accordingly, but it turns into a confident anticipation of the answer, and a triumphant contemplation of the result. "In my distress I cried unto the Lord, and He heard me.

Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue. What shall be given unto thee? or what shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue? Sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper." A great noise this: what is it all about? Troubled people begin their communications at the end, as if taking it for granted that all see with their eyes, and know what they know. The complainant calms down, and describes his lamentable situation. "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar! My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace. I am for peace: but when I speak, they are for war." We have to ponder the painful circumstances, tried refuge and sure salvation, depicted in the song.

Mesech was a son of Japheth; and a son of Aram, the son of Shem, bore the same name. It denotes here the descendants of one or the other, north from Jerusalem, in the farthest part of the world, as the Israelites would think, and in their estimation a race of fierce barbarians. (Gen. x. 2, 23; 1 Chron. i. 17; Ezek. xxvii. 13; xxxii. 26; xxxviii. 2, 3; xxxix. 1.) Kedar was a son of Ishmael; and in this place the appellation signifies his wild posterity, south from the Holy City, in a region of Arabia; dwelling in tents, and turning their hand against every man. (Gen. xvi. 12; xxv. 13; 1 Chron. i. 29; Song i. 5; Isa. xxi. 16, 17; xlii. 11; lx. 7.) The language is metaphorical, for the same people could not be in opposite countries remote from each other, and the two races did not intimately mingle in any border land. The implacable people among or near whom the children of the captivity had to work and wait, whether degenerate countrymen, oppressive Chaldeans, or, more probably, malicious Samaritans, were no better than the fathers of the Muscovites or the offspring of Hagar. In the same way we speak of the Goths whom we encounter,

Arabs in our streets, and heathens in Christendom. The psalm, passing from figure to fact, explains itself in the concluding verses. "My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace." By Mesech and Kedar are meant the disturbers of Israel.

The inhabitants of the land, of mixed races and religions, who wanted at first, for their own purposes, to fraternize with the returned Jews, showed themselves anything but brotherly when their doubtful co-operation was rejected, perverting the words of the patriots, and hindering their work. It was not once only that they were as troublesome as if they had been Moschi or Bedouins: they habitually opposed, misrepresented and damaged the Lord's people. The language of the psalm is that of an exposed community tired of the gibes and cruelties of their heathenish neighbours. "My soul hath long dwelt"—"is weary of dwelling" —"with him that hateth peace. I am for peace: but when I speak, they are for war." Instead of taking my words as they were intended, they give them a sense I never dreamed of, answer them in a sharply hostile spirit, and proceed to misrepresent them in imperial quarters. Making my position precarious and unhappy, throwing a shadow of blight and ruin over my cherished prospect, imperilling my very "soul," their malevolence vitally affects the object for which I came back to the sacred hill of Zion.

Changes take place in men and nations, for better or worse, not only in their disposition geographically, but in their motives and character. If the children of the captivity were now reformed, yet it was for having verged on heathenism not altogether unlike that of the motley people around them that their fathers had been carried to Babylon. Punishment had done Judah and Benjamin such good that they were shocked at the profanity and paganism of those

who had obtained possession of their desecrated country, and would have no dealings with them; but the day would come when they would themselves be again degenerate. They might not literally worship idols in the future; but, making God's commandments void by vain and foolish traditions, and despising and rejecting the Messiah, they would as much as their present corrupt neighbours deserve to be likened to the children of Mesech and Kedar. As their life in contact with unfriendly tribes, so the ministry of the incarnate Lord among their own descendants would be comparable with being under the yoke of northern barbarians or by the black tents of Arabian archers. In the sorrows of the Messiah and His infant Church, the children of the outcast harassed the children of promise; the sons of the bond-woman persecuted the sons of the free; the new Jerusalem, rising out of the old, was molested and slandered by a "faithless and perverse generation." Christ was Peace; but when He spoke, they answered with war. They laid snares to catch Him in His words, and they thrust Him, where they themselves must go, into the iron hands of the Romans.

What time has there been in the history of the Church, or in the career of the saint, when this pilgrim-song might not have been used? Since the day it was first chanted, have there been any whose object was to restore God's city and Temple, and who desired to dwell harmlessly with the people among whom they were placed by Providence, who did not find their motives questioned, their sayings perverted, their measures thwarted, their souls wounded and wearied with slanders and falsehoods? Occasions have arisen when words from the adversaries of God's martyrs hardened into stones flung against them, and the tongues of their persecutors flashed into leaping flames. In the present

day outwardly, as in all days spiritually, the service of God is perfect freedom in favoured lands like ours; but where even now is the Christian who could not tell of perils among false brethren? Cain, Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Sanballat, Haman, Herod, Judas, Caiaphas, Nero, all have been swept away: still most who set out for and reach Mount Zion have reason enough to cry, "Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! many are they that rise up against me" (Psalm iii. 1). "Lo, the wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart" (Psalm xi. 2). They professed to be good neighbours, offered themselves as patrons, affected to caress us, shook hands with us for their own advantage; now they lift their fists against us, because we could not conscientiously let them have their selfish way, but declined to be ruined by their treacherous kindness. They would not be at peace with us on proper terms; and they prevented our wished-for peace, excepting our inward peace with God.

The missionary abroad, persecuted by ungrateful pagans, and maligned and hindered by immoral and envious settlers; the evangelist at home, whom Pharisees pronounce a low person, and infidels despise; the Methodist, nicknamed by one party a schismatic, and by another now patted on the back, and then cuffed and kicked; the Christian student, in a class composed mainly of disdainful unbelievers and provoking worldlings; the religious workman hated by intemperate associates for his purity, and cursed by blasphemers among them for his piety; the God-fearing apprentice, under an ill-tempered taskmaster who construes his mistakes into proofs of hypocrisy, and among thoughtless shop-mates who ridicule his habits of devotion and his scrupulous behaviour; the converted youth whose parents are not ashamed of being without sittings in the sanctuary, and whose brothers and

sisters are Sabbath-breakers; any one of these tried saints of the Lord, and many another sufferer from proud and false tongues, may use the words, "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!"

Having looked at the painful circumstances which may be understood to have originated the psalm, and the distressing situations of the righteous in which it continues to be appropriate, we turn from the last to the first verses of it, to contemplate the proved refuge of the Lord's afflicted people. It is refreshing, in memory's walks, to stop at monuments of deliverance, and consider, not only what conflicts we have been engaged in, but how we gained every victory. Israel, the Church, saints, in the midst of sorrows, refer for comfort and guidance to experience. What was the successful course I took in a former trouble? "In my distress I cried unto the Lord, and He heard me." How thankful I am that I then cried unto the Lord! He could not have heard me, if I had not cried unto Him; and for Him to hear me, was to give me help. He set my praying soul free from Babylon, and put me to the welcome work of rebuilding His temple. And will He not strengthen me against my Samaritan enemies? "The same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever," He will repeat His answer, if I renew my prayer. O Lord, by Thy grace I do so. My life and hopes are again in peril; show Thine ear not heavy, and Thy saving arm not shortened. "Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue."

Let devotion keep pace with distress, and triumph will rise out of trial. The psalm suggests to troubled saints the advantage of promptitude in review and petition. The experience of those whom God has supported and saved demonstrates that the Throne of Grace is the sure refuge of the righteous in times of affliction. Turning their eyes to

the golden names of glorious victories inscribed on their sacred banners, they are encouraged in present battle to lift up their hearts to the Captain of their salvation, Who will again and always aid and deliver them for His name's sake. In the sweet shelter of prayer, the Church has sustained its life in whatever seasons of reproach and danger. The storms of circumstance described by the ecclesiastical historian have driven the people of the Lord into His nearer presence. How glad was their Head and Exemplar to withdraw from the foul and choking atmosphere of malignant and deceitful tongues to the pure air of mountain slopes and heights where He might be alone with the Father! So had Enoch, Noah, Job, Moses, Samuel, David, Elijah, Isaiah, Daniel, Nehemiah, and all the Old Testament worthies, been wont to renew their strength. So have Christ's troubled followers since refreshed themselves at the Fount of salvation. A chronicle of tumults is not a complete account of the Church's behaviour and progress. Its real history, behind the rolling smoke, is its faithful waiting at the feet of the Almighty. It could not die, because it watched and prayed. In England, amid the throes that gave birth to the Reformation, the Church seemed as if being torn to pieces by kings and queens, priests and statesmen; but there were choice spirits all the while crying to the Lord in secret. Through the Revolution and Restoration, it was trampled upon by proud cavaliers, and stripped and hacked by armed fanatics; but there were wounded saints on every side who did not cease to consult their Divine Deliverer. In the slights put upon the apostles of the eighteenth century, it looked as if the Church were tearing out its own heart, and casting it away; but thousands up and down the land, never bowing the knee to sect or party, were deriving power and consolation from communion with Jehovah. It is the same

in the career of the private saint. How often he has been shot at by flattering and evil tongues! True, but not all the truth. From Mesech and Kedar, from the sinful hearth, the ungodly workshop, the blasphemous mill, the persecuting mart, he has been accustomed to fly to the foot-stool of Heavenly Mercy. When he speaks for himself, he says, "In my distress I cried unto the Lord, and He heard me." I cry unto Him now, and am sure He hears me still. "Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue."

The highest degree of prayer is faith. In the presence of God, the soul sees the event. He whose confiding petition the Creator hears, has an answer to his fellow-creature's threats and taunts. O my enemy, wilt thou have thy own way? Not in me: the weapons thou aimest at me shall be turned back in double force upon thy own head. Thou shalt eat of the fruit of thy own way, and be filled with thy own devices (Prov. i. 31; Psalm x.) "What shall be given unto thee? or what shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue?" As the margin reads, "What shall be added unto thee?" Thou thinkest of being happy for my sorrow, and of gaining by my ruin; but the Almighty Saviour Who has heard my supplication shall give thee what thou wouldest give me, and add something for thy due punishment. There is an allusion to the ancient form of oath, "God do so to thee, and more also" (1 Sam. iii. 17; xiv. 44; Ruth i. 17). "What shall He give unto thee? or what shall He add unto thee, thou false tongue? Sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper."

These words include a description of the false tongue. It is so natural to compare the "little member" that "boasteth great things" to a keen weapon or a destructive fire, that probably both figures occur in all languages. They are fre-

quently met with in the Scriptures (Psalm lv. 21; lvii. 4; lix. 7; Prov. xi. 9; xii. 18; xvi. 27; xviii. 8; xxvi. 18-22; Jer. ix. 8; James iii. 5, 6). But while the mind makes this comparison in our song, the words used exceed a description of the deceitful tongue. Otherwise, the question would be left unanswered, and no reason could be assigned for the sudden transition to the plural. The question is, "What shall be given unto thee? or what shall be added unto thee, thou false tongue?" This is the reply, "Sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper." Thy arrows are not pointless, and thou aimest them with some precision; but on my side is the Almighty Warrior. Thou art able to scorch me for a season; but the vengeance of my Deliverer upon thee is a burning fire that never shall be quenched. He shall more than pay thee in thy own coin. Seeking my ruin, thou destroyest thyself. Thou fallest on thy own sword, and into thy own flame. Nay, thou drawest down upon thee the two-edged sword of the mouth of the Almighty (Rev. i. 16; ii. 16; xix. 15, 21). Thou provokest to thy eternal perdition the "Consuming Fire" (Deut. iv. 24; ix. 3; Heb. xii. 29). "Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof" (Prov. xviii. 21). They who use it as an arrow shot forth with inflamed combustibles wrapped about it to set fire to the habitations of others, bring upon their own dwellings and themselves "sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper" (Eph. vi. 16).

By "coals of juniper" or "broom" is meant the most vehemently and longest burning fuel, and by "sharp arrows of the mighty" the vengeful weapons of the conqueror. Both figures denote ways and instruments of punishment, and are here employed to picture the defeat and ruin that will come from Jehovah upon His people's enemies (Psalm

vii. 13; xlv. 5; cxl. 9-11). "The Lord is a man of war: the Lord is His name" (Exod. xv. 3; Isa. xlii. 13). "He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in His sight" (Psalm lxxii. 14). They who stir their tongues against His children shall have Him move His tongue against themselves. Do men live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God? It is equally true that by His voice they die. He has but to speak, and they perish. "The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave His voice; hailstones and coals of fire. Yea, He sent out His arrows, and scattered them; and He shot out lightnings, and discomfited them" (Psalm xviii. 13, 14). "Canst thou thunder with a voice like His?" (Job xl. 9). Are thy fiery darts sharp as His omnipotent words? Is thy crackling fury irresistible like His righteous wrath? "Where is thy sting? where is thy victory?"

Not in a vindictive spirit does the true Israelite sing this hymn. He but encourages himself to hope in the name of the Lord, and would impress his surrounding adversaries with the danger of vituperating and injuring God's people. So the European in the midst of Asia's hostile hordes comforts himself and warns his enemies by referring to the might and justice of the Government he serves and represents. "What king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able?" (Luke xiv. 31). A wise power, before pronouncing its ultimatum, considers whether it has arms to match the instruments of battle it would encounter. Do we vaunt of England walking over Abyssinia and Ashanti, making Burmah or China stand to listen, ruling the millions of Hindustan, and keeping the ocean clear of enemies? There is a superior Potentate. The helplessness of great India

against Britain, or little Denmark against Germany, is mightiness compared with the resources of all the human race together in opposition to the Lord. On His side we are safe. The ungodly Samaritan has no strength against the godly Jew, the Pagan none against the Christian, the wicked none against the just, the world none against the Church, Satan none against our Saviour. "Keep thy tongue from evil-speaking, lying, and slandering;" and, instead of falling with transgressors before, thou shalt have shelter with the righteous behind the arrows and fire of God. Be at peace with Israel, lest Israel's King become thy enemy. Cast down thy weapons of war against Jehovah, lest He take His up, and smite thee, and destroy thee. Tremble at the terror of the Lord, "sharp arrows of the Mighty, with coals of juniper."

The language of the wasted and weary, the psalm is also that of the confiding and persevering. Why should the Lord's people allow lying lips to divert them from the work which He has given them to do, and for which He will find them means and opportunities according to His pleasure? Let the false tongue call them presumptuous, ambitious, incapable, insane: the city and temple of God will yet be completed. They will think less of the adversaries around them, and more of the Master and Friend among them and over all. Their foes may be strong and fierce as Mesech, and wild and false as Kedar; but the Mighty One who delivered them before is their present Saviour. In the renewal of their distress, they cry to the Lord as formerly; and He repeats His mercies, giving them peace even when there is no peace. "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. iv. 6, 7).

When humbly in distress I cried,
 The gracious Lord inclined His ear;
Again I in His love confide,
 And call upon His mercy near.

Thy grace to help me, Lord, I crave,
 And in Thy willing power believe
My soul from lying lips to save,
 And foes that flatter and deceive.

False tongue, that would'st my ruin see,
 In vain thou dost thy poison spend:
What shall be done, and more, to thee,
 When God His flaming bow shall bend?

We live or perish by His word,
 And none can meet His angry eye:
No thunder like His voice is heard,
 No arrows like His lightnings fly.

More fiercely than the blazing broom,
 More lasting than its burning coals,
His kindled vengeance shall consume,
 His wrath repay malicious souls.

Forgive, O Lord, my endless moan:
 To Thee I must my trouble tell,
Who under Mesech's burden groan,
 And by the tents of Kedar dwell.

No momentary wound I mourn;
 My soul is weary of the grief
Whose galling weight so long I've borne,
 And whence I now implore relief.

From enmity they will not cease;
 They truth and tolerance abhor:
My loyal heart is all for peace;
 But, when I speak, they offer war.

II.

GOD OUR KEEPER.

"1. I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills,
From whence cometh my help.
2. My help cometh from the LORD,
Which made heaven and earth.
3. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved:
He that keepeth thee will not slumber.
4. Behold, He that keepeth Israel
Shall neither slumber nor sleep.
5. The LORD is thy keeper:
The LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand.
6. The sun shall not smite thee by day,
Nor the moon by night.
7. The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil:
He shall preserve thy soul.
8. The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in
From this time forth, and even for evermore."

—PSALM cxxi.

FAINT at the close of life's journey, a Christian pilgrim repeated the line,—

"Will He not His help afford?"

She quoted it several times, trying to recall the song in which it occurs, and asked that the once familiar hymn, part of the voice of which she caught, might be all fetched home to her mind again; and she was greatly refreshed and comforted when we read at her bed-side Charles Wesley's spirited paraphrase, beginning,—

"To the hills I lift mine eyes,
The everlasting hills;
Streaming thence in fresh supplies,
My soul the Spirit feels.

Will He not His help afford?
Help, while yet I ask, is given:
God comes down; the God and Lord
That made both earth and heaven."

Nothing could have more appropriately occupied the attention of the dying saint than the question she repeated, and the Scriptural hymn in which it is contained and answered. This "Song for the Ascents," a title slightly varying from that of each of the other Gradual Psalms, is as suitable as any for the Israelite's use when not leaving his home for the earthly Jerusalem, but only meditating on the circumstances and prospects of his spiritual progress, especially when life is drawing to a close; but its beauties are more apparent if we regard it as bursting from the lips of the pilgrims as after their long, weary, and dangerous march, in spite of Mesech and Kedar, though not yet beyond their reach, they come at last in sight of the mountain range of Moriah and Zion. O joyful! Yonder is Jerusalem! There is the sheen of the Temple! Our journey is nearly over. "Lift up your hearts. We lift them up unto the Lord." "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills. Whence cometh my help? My help cometh from the Lord, Which made heaven and earth."

Jehovah is appealed to by the Church or saint in the first three verses, and in the remainder answers and confirms His believing people. The psalm is for the true Israel in every historical degree. It has passed from the Hebrews to Christians, and suits them well in their families and congregations; and as did the pious Jew, so the disciple

of the Lord Jesus makes it his private song. Through its sacred words, from the Spirit who gave them, help will come to us in considering the need, source, and means of help.

Help is needed. The language is that of one consciously liable to injury. As the pilgrim pursues his exposed and adventurous way, with his bundle on his back or his treasure in his hand, his very "soul" is in danger. His life hangs on a thread. The psalm affords us two or three glimpses of him in the midst of his alarms.

Rugged intervening hills make him long the more for the mountain of holy rest beyond. A slip on this declivity, and he may slide a long way down. A fall among these rough stones, and he may bruise or break his limbs. A false step on this doubtful verge, and he may be taken up a mangled corpse. Yet his heart does not fail; for a whisper is in the air, "He will not suffer thy foot to be moved."

We see the pilgrim travelling in the day. He drags himself along, sweating, panting, wondering if he can bear the intense heat many minutes longer, and doing his best to screen his aching brow effectually against the burning sky. A sunstroke, and he will be left on the road in fever, paralysis, death. Oh for an attendant at his side to hold an umbrella over his head! Oh for the pleasant shadow of his verandah or fig-tree at home, or, better still, of the majestic portico in the high-walled Temple which he hoped to reach! The Spirit assures him that he is not without protection. "The Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day" (2 Kings iv. 19; Jonah iv. 8; Psalm cii. 4).

When the king of day proceeds to lie down in the west, throwing off his crimson robe for the mantle of darkness, the tired pilgrim desires repose. Alas! there are perils by night as well as day. The moon may shine clearly in a fair

sky, surrounded by admiring stars, but is a friend not to be trusted, and there is proof that its direct beams are productive of injury like that from a stroke of the sun. As we gratefully remember, the kind Eastern, if the traveller lies down to sleep, and leaves his face exposed when the moon is shining, comes and arouses him, and tells him he never thinks himself of falling asleep until he has covered his head with his garment. The shivering pilgrim, coiling himself on the ground, cannot help fearing injuries that would attend him to the grave,—ague, ophthalmia, giddiness, lunacy. Can he safely or possibly slumber? A warm covering is gently spread over him by attending angels, and he hears in sweet dreams their soft voices say, "Nor the moon by night." The moon shall not hurt thee. (Gen. xxxi. 40; Jer. xxxvi. 30.)

Not only such dangers as have been indicated, but all the different perils of the twenty-four hours are covered by the promise, "The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night." The "greater light" sees more evils than those which have been mentioned, to which the traveller is exposed; for example, the enemy in eager pursuit, and the robber lying in wait. The queen of night witnesses other dangers round him in his sleep; for instance, the venomous reptile, and the hungry beast of prey. Hour after hour, in the midst of known and unknown perils, the foot-sore pilgrim feels in himself helpless against them all. In personal weakness, exhaustion, and mistrust, now choosing his steps, and wondering if he ever will reach his painful journey's end; now, with his hand over his brow, earnestly looking onwards to discern, if he can, the outline of the long-wished-for beautiful mountain; now disposing his aching limbs, and inviting "tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep;" he says all the day long, "I will lift up mine eyes

unto the hills;" and continues, while awake or dreaming, through the night, "Whence cometh my help?"

Christian, in that exposed, weak, worn pilgrim see yourself journeying to the holy city and golden temple on the heavenly hill. Thus far, thank God, you have travelled safely. Through what dangers you have come! Fear has not left you. What perils still surround you! What a prospect yet presents itself of suffering and toil! You are inclined to doubt whether you will ever complete this rough and weary pilgrimage. Will not your foot slide? You have need to step with care. The sun may strike you: you may be smitten by the moon. Night and day, enemies are after or before you. "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter v. 8). The world is unkind to you, and the flesh a burden. What various trials you experience! Bruises disfigure you. How weak you are! You need a guide. You long for some one to defend and uphold you. Who will help you?

The words, "From whence cometh my help?" are a question not of anxious doubt, but of confident self-reply. He who utters them has already stated whence assistance is derived. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills." Why so? I answer, Where else shall I look for succour? What besides is there in which to trust and hope? "From whence cometh my help," but from those blessed hills? that is to say, from Him Who has there His throne and residence, Jehovah, of Whom those hills remind me? So long as they remain unshaken, it is unreasonable to despair.

A point of the range is Zion, on which are the ark of the covenant, the altars of worship, and Jehovah's oracle. There is His holy temple. No mountain is so excellent. "Why leap ye, ye high hills? This is the hill" (Psalm

lxviii. 16). It is the Church, with its solemn ordinances. It is the place where prayer is wont to be made. It is where God's voice is heard, His blessing received, His love celebrated. I can expect no help, if I do not visit Zion (Psalm lxxxiv. 1, 2; cxxxvii. 4-6).

The hill of Zion points up to where my pilgrimage of life should end. To heaven I really look. I go on to Jerusalem, by God's command, because thence, according to His will, I have the nearest view of the celestial temple. I attend the place of common worship, because therefrom I seem best to reach the hand of God held out from above to aid me. The help Zion gives is help from heaven for my heavenward journey. If I despised consecrated places and appointed solemnities, how could my heart be a temple? Praying beforehand and in every degree of my journey, I make it impossible to find the hill of the Lord barren. It would be of little use pressing on to any sacred mountains of earth, if I were not looking beyond and above them, and, by means of them, to the Source of the blessings that clothe Zion and Hermon with beauty, gladness, and hope. The help I want, help for my soul to ascend to heaven, can only come from heaven; and I go to the hills to meet it.

The true Source of help is neither the sanctuary of goodly stones and well-ordered ministrations, nor the created heaven. It is He who makes His tabernacle in Zion, and His temple in the sky. The help that comes from the holy mountains is help from the Lord. But for His throne upon them, the hills unto which I lift up mine eyes would be no better than other hills. I see Him there, with His hands full of blessings, waiting to be gracious (Psalm xiv. 7; xx. 1, 2; lxviii. 16; lxxxvii. 1, 2).

The psalm may be sung any hour of the day, but seems best adapted to evening worship. It is a good song for the

end of the week, in preparation for the Sabbath. How sweet will be the dreams of the pilgrim who, before night draws the curtain, and slumber closes the eyelids, has got near enough to the holy hills to distinguish Zion! Does the Christian, like Jacob, at the end of a daily stage of his journey rest at Luz? He will set out in the morning from Bethel, and God's sustaining presence will carry him along. He sees the ladder of salvation, and is consciously, in his degree, on the way to riches and glory. God promises to watch over His servant in Padan-aram, and send him home a prosperous man to Canaan (Gen. xxviii. 15-19). He will protect the pilgrim-Church in Egypt and Babylon, and bring it forth from the house of bondage. He will safely conduct His people through the sea, the desert, and the river, to the promised country that flows with milk and honey. Kedar may harass, Mesech oppress, Samaria threaten; but succour will come from the God of Jacob. He will guard the pilgrim in life, in death, and into heaven. "Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which Thy hands have established" (Exod. xv. 17).

The question, "From whence cometh my help?" is followed immediately by the answer, "My help cometh from the Lord, Which made heaven and earth." It comes neither from the Church below nor from the Church above, except as it comes from Him Who built and inhabits both. My helper is He Who created the hills and the heavens, Whose wisdom and power are infinite, Whose stores are always ready, Whose resources are for ever inexhaustible. The thought of the psalm, for the sake of which it was written, is, "The Lord is thy keeper." From this point, as rays from a star, the circling verses spring. Six times the word is used. Six times the song says that the Lord is the

Keeper of the otherwise helpless pilgrim. "The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: He shall preserve thy soul."

You wonder, pilgrim, whether you will be able to set an example of perseverance, and secure the results of holding up and out to the end. Your fear is of your foot slipping; and you are the more afraid from your knowledge that some would be glad if you should stumble and fall. Be ashamed of the foolish fear. Ask, like the dying saint, "Will He not His help afford?" Hath He forgotten to be gracious? Has God helped me so far, and will He not help me farther? Is not His presence with me every moment? "Hear me, lest otherwise they should rejoice over me: when my foot slippeth, they magnify themselves against me. For I am ready to halt, and my sorrow is continually before me" (Psalm xxxviii. 16, 17). So say like David to the Lord, and you shall sing with him to the Church, "O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of His praise to be heard: Which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved" (Psalm lxvi. 8, 9). "He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone" (Psalm xci. 11, 12).

You tremble at the perils of the threatening day. Beneath the blazing sun, in the parching air, on the scorching sand, what will become of you? The Lord, Who screened the Israelites with His pillar of cloud, and miraculously slaked their thirst, "shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land" (Isa. xxxii. 2). "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Psalm xci. 1).

You shudder at the dangers of the frowning night. Dare

you step on? Or dare you close your eyes? "He that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."

"Neither sin, nor earth, nor hell,
Thy Keeper can surprise."

"I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for Thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety" (Psalm iv. 8). "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me" (Psalm xxiii. 4; 1 Kings xviii. 27; Job vii. 20).

To ask such questions as, "From whence cometh my help?" is to be in the way of deliverance and success. Lifting up our eyes unto the hills, brings us some help from them. The thought of where we shall be, keeps us on our feet, however weary. The prospect of entering that country, dwelling in that city, singing in that temple, makes us content to be struggling onward. Considering the glorious end of our dangers and difficulties, we gather courage, strength, and determination. To gain that object, it is worth while contending with these obstacles. To reach that goal, and receive our reward from Christ, we will continue by His help to pick our steps through these stones, snares, and other perils. Cheer up, O comrade!

"Our souls are in His mighty hand,
And He shall keep them still;
And you and I shall surely stand
With Him on Zion's hill!"

The opening verse would be a suitable inscription for a church entrance. It is a scripture to be repeated when walking to the temple. If ever the eyes are strained towards heaven, it is by those who go to the sanctuary, or

long to do so. Yet it is possible to join the assembly of God's saints, and not lift up our eyes to the hills. Some who make excursions seem to see all the meaning of their journey in what they take with them, others go chiefly to refresh themselves in the contemplation of God's flowers and trees, rocks and rivers, valleys and hills. Of travellers climbing together to a mountain summit, there are those who on reaching it, as if they had done all, lie down till the moment for returning; while their wiser companions, as if there were something for which they have been at the trouble of ascending, stand on the top, and look forth earnestly. They admire the prospect, and mark the direction of a more lofty mountain which they intend to gain, and how the road lies by which they will have to travel thither. Our feet are to visit the hill of the earthly Zion, that our hearts may get a better view of the mountain of the Lord's house in the heavenly country. The object in attending the services of the sanctuary is to "hear of heaven and learn the way."

Look up for yourself, pilgrim. If others are praying for you, they are not praying instead of you. Let them be praying with you. Of what use to you can it be that they lift up their eyes to the hills, and obtain aid from the Lord, unless you yourself consider from Whom cometh your help? To obtain succour from "our Keeper of unsleeping eye," personal prayer is indispensable. The first and second verses are the bending of the knees; the third is a wish or petition. "Let Him not suffer thy foot to be moved: let not Him that keepeth thee slumber." The prayer is first, and then, in the rest of the psalm, comes the answer. "O send out Thy light and Thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto Thy holy hill, and to Thy tabernacles" (Psalm xliii. 3). "I cried unto the Lord with my voice,

and He heard me out of His holy hill" (Psalm iii. 4; xxv. 15; lxi. 1-4; cxxiii. 1; cxli. 8).

"Myself I cannot save,
Myself I cannot keep;
But strength in Thee I surely have,
Whose eyelids never sleep:

My soul to Thee alone
Now therefore I commend;
Thou, Jesus, love me as Thy own,
And love me to the end."

Some enquire whence cometh their help without lifting up their eyes to the hills, and stepping on in the way of salvation. It is a careless question with them. They ought to "ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward" (Jer. l. 5). God promises help to those who help themselves. "The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore." "If thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all His commandments, blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out" (Deut. xxviii. 1-6). Effort must be made to fulfil our duties in life, and at the same time get on in the Christian pilgrimage. To do nothing in religion because of the world, or to refuse to give up the world while working in it, would leave us where we are. Our going out and coming in, that is, our round of temporal occupations, must be associated with attention and obedience to God (Deut. xxxi. 2; 1 Sam. xxix. 6).

Obtain God's help, and, however circumstanced, you are happy. In thoughtful meditation, public worship, personal prayer, and believing effort, lift up your eyes to the heavenly hills, and He Who dwells in Zion looks forth thence upon you in mercy. He is watching the stratagems and ap-

proaches of your enemies, and will quickly descend whenever you want His succour. In His name and might you will vanquish all assailants; and He will allow no adversaries to present themselves unawares (Psalm cxxv. 1, 2). The foes of God and His saints are abandoned and impotent beings. "Their shadow is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not" (Numb. xiv. 9).

Remain without God's aid, and, however pleasant may seem your lot, you are miserable, exposed, and perishing. There is no helper besides in whom to trust. To rely on Heshbon or Egypt is not to be protected by the shadow, but confused and lost in the cloud (Isa. xxx. 1-8; Jer. xlviii. 45).

To whom do you belong? Are you of the true Israel? The Lord is Israel's keeper. Deserve to be called by the patriarch's new name. Pray and prevail. After every day's journey, lift up your eyes unto the hills. You are getting nearer and nearer. The last evening of your pilgrimage will come; and on the morning after, your feet shall stand within the gates of Jerusalem. "Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God" (Col. iii. 1). "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God" (Gal. vi. 16).

The way is long; but I will lift mine eyes
Unto the hills beneath the watching skies.
Whence comes my help but from my journey's End?
Who made the skies and mountains is my Friend.

I fear to dash my foot against a stone,
And bruis'd and bleeding make my ling'ring moan.
A slip might send me sliding, till 'twere vain
To try to climb into the path again.

If near some crumbling verge I chance to go,
A mangled corpse I may be found below.

Nay, thus I hear my fainting heart reproved,
Thy foot He will not suffer to be moved.

I drag along beneath the burning sun,
And wonder if my race will e'er be run.
To screen my head against his cloudless ray
Is all my effort through the parching day.

I may be sun-struck, in the road to lie,
With panting fever palsied, till I die.
Nay, says the Voice Divine, be not dismayed,
The Lord on thy right hand shall be thy shade.

If, after all the day's exhausting toil,
Beneath the moon my aching limbs I coil,
I shall but suffer from the chilling dews,
And cutting winds that needed sleep refuse.

Let crowding stars admire the queen of night,
I find no blessing in her partial light.
Nay, I can hear the heav'nly word again,
Nor smitten by the moon shalt thou complain.

The sun all day beholds my chasing foe,
And where the lurking robber bends his bow ;
At night envenom'd reptiles round me creep
And prowling beasts prevent approaching sleep.

I never know what evils may befall,
And night and day am helpless against all.
Nay, do not murmur so, the Spirit says
The Lord thy Keeper is in all thy ways.

Why leap ye in disdain, ye common hills ?
Behold the mountain God with glory fills,
The temple that on lofty Zion stands,
And lifts in prayer the saint's or nation's hands.

It points to heaven, the final wish'd-for goal,
And brings it nearer to the pilgrim's soul,
And raises the imploring spirit nigh
The Father's hand down-reaching from the sky.

The mountain of Jehovah's house above
Is from no height so clearly seen by love.
The help I supplicate, on Zion given,
Is grace from God to lead me up to heaven.

On neither rites nor altars I rely,
But Him Who built the temple and the sky.
Behold, He slumbers not Who Israel keeps;
The Guardian of the pilgrim never sleeps.

The Lord preserves my soul, is better said,
Than that my life hangs trembling on a thread.
My going out and coming in the Lord
Henceforth shall rule, and evermore reward.

III.

THE CITY OF PEACE.

"1. I was glad when they said unto me,
Let us go into the house of the LORD.
2. Our feet shall stand
Within thy gates, O Jerusalem.
3. Jerusalem is builded
As a city that is compact together:
4. Whither the tribes go up,
The tribes of the LORD, unto the testimony of Israel,
To give thanks unto the name of the LORD.
5. For there are set thrones of judgment,
The thrones of the house of David.
6. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
They shall prosper that love thee.
7. Peace be within thy walls,
And prosperity within thy palaces.
8. For my brethren and companions' sakes,
I will now say, Peace be within thee.
9. Because of the house of the LORD our God
I will seek thy good."

—PSALM CXXII.

IT is not impossible to see with some distinctness, and to infer that the Hebrews more clearly saw, fitness of contact and succession in these pilgrim-songs. They are only confused as the flowers in a nosegay put together with design and taste. They are an instrument of fifteen strings arranged and tuned in orderly "degrees." The first hymn pictured the Lord's people nursing hope and sighing for peace in the midst of heartless adversaries. The second showed them

toiling anxiously, but trustingly, on their way to the holy mountain. The third, representing them still in concourse, is appropriate to almost any "degrees" in their pilgrim-journey. As they leave their homes, as they pursue their course, as in the morning they resume their march, as they approach the gates of the city, or as they pause within them, and prepare to go up in solemn procession with music and song to the sanctuary, this is the sentiment they express, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." It is pleasant when the time returns for visiting Jerusalem, and friends and neighbours begin to make the proposal, and with them I repeat, "Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob" (Isa. ii. 3).

As families, firms, or societies prosper, they build themselves better houses. The present is a song on the entrance of the Church and State of Israel into a superior habitation. It seems to have been originally written in the interval between the translation of the Ark to Zion by David and the erection of the Temple there by Solomon. The sacred symbol was sheltered in a temporary sanctuary worthy of the king and period; and Jerusalem was already called the "city of David," the civil capital containing his throne of rule and seats of judgment (verse 5; 2 Sam. v. 9; vi. 10, 12, 16; xv. 2; 1 Kings iii. 16). The victories and other successes of the son of Jesse indicating God's holy will, and the supreme tribunal and the centre of worship having to be in the same place (Deut. xvii. 8, 9), Jehovah thus showed that He selected Jerusalem for His rest and residence; and it was accordingly now declared to be, not David's city only, but the city of God, the religious as well as civil metropolis, including, as the first and last verses say, "the house of the Lord," a name not confined to Solomon's edifice, but be-

longing also to the holy erections by which it was preceded. Those provisional buildings were also called the temple; and solemn processions to Zion's Tabernacle, with singings in praise of the Lord, were customary in David's reign (2 Sam. xii. 20; Psalm v. 7; xv. 1; xxvii. 4; xxx., title; xlii. 4; lv. 14).

The affection of a nation is not easily diverted from one place to another. If anything can change the bent of the popular mind, it is a taking psalm or ballad. Hence the familiar saying that to have the ability to furnish songs that a people will accept, is to be able to mould their prejudices and direct their ways. David governed with his harp as much as with his sword and sceptre. This song of his seems to have been meant to help the people of Israel to a farther degree in their march as a nation. The conjecture is plausible that the particular aim of its royal author was to wean his subjects from an order of things which it was desirable should be superseded, and attach them to a new centre of government and worship. Transfusing his soul into the united tribes, and singing from their mouth, he taught them in this ode to express wonder and satisfaction as, in thought or fact, they came in sight of Jerusalem, and, passing through its goodly gates, gazed on its fresh bulwarks and palaces, and advanced to the new tabernacle (vers. 4, 7; see 2 Sam. vi. 1-19; 1 Chron. xiii. 5; xv. 3). "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." My own heart has been beating to say the same to those over whom I rejoice for having been first to make the pleasant proposal. It is delightful to encourage one another thus; and to Zion will we go. "Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem;" tarrying willingly, if impatiently, while the weak and weary come up, and we organize the careful procession to the beloved sanctuary.

It is not merely with the wonder of rustics on their first arrival in a town, staring on such rows of handsome houses, and on such grand monuments as they never saw before, and never thought to see, that the pilgrims are represented as admiring Jerusalem. The surprise they are made to express is rather that of visitors, witnessing a transformation and an improvement since they last saw the place, or beyond what they had heard of its character. Zion was not so attractive when it fell into David's hands. He has created on the high ground a fortress of palaces (ver. 7; 2 Sam. v. 9). "Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together." Few cities are thus knit to defy the force of time and the assaults of enemies. Some can hardly be said even to have been built, but look as if they had been loosely thrown upon the careless land. This is so compact a city and stronghold, that it is worthy to be offered to the Lord as His dwelling-place, and to command the acceptance of all the tribes as their established centre of civil and religious unity (2 Sam. v. 11, 12; Psalm xlviii. 12-14); and its outward magnificence is to be, and now is, surpassed by its inward glory as the metropolis "whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord," His peculiar people, chosen from the nations, "unto the testimony of Israel," to the place of Israel's testimony, the place where the national laws and records are preserved (Exod. xvi. 34; xxvii. 21), or in compliance with Israel's testimony, with the rule that the male population shall attend the three annual festivals (Exod. xii. 14; xxiii. 17; xxxiv. 22, 23; Deut. xvi. 16; 1 Kings ix. 25),—"whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord,—an ordinance of Israel,—to give thanks unto the name of the Lord. For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David." It is not only another capital, but the seat of another dynasty. The house of Saul having been deposed

the royal bard causes his people to acknowledge the amazing signs of the vigour and stability of the anointed house of David (2 Sam. iii. 1; Psalm xxi. 4; cxxxviii. 3). It is a picture of combined and quiet strength. The pilgrims do not look upon a solitary throne, exposed and insecure, but see thrones, firm and safe, beneath and around David's, occupied simultaneously by his advisers, administrators, and magistrates, including his sons, all in his royal name and service (2 Sam. viii. 18; 1 Chron. xviii. 17). They behold a broadly organized and settled government. "For there sit thrones for judgment, thrones for the house of David."

The psalm bursts into a mutual exhortation. The pilgrims call upon one another to pray and work that Jerusalem may indeed be what its aspect promises and its name imports, a possession of peace (Psalm lxxvi. 2). They play upon the name. Often have the prosperity and power of a city depended upon the religious exercises and life of interested friends and inhabitants (Gen. xviii. 23-32; xix. 21; Jer. xxix. 7; Dan. iv. 27). "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem." No sooner said than done. As the song directs and inspires, the pilgrims at once offer prayer for the city of David and of God, encouraging one another with the hope of participating in its tranquillity and welfare, and determined to uphold its glory. In mingled anticipation, petition, benediction and resolution, as actually or mentally they march along, they sing, "They shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek thy good."

It is subordinately that David wishes the stability and glory of Jerusalem as the seal of his victories and the seat of his government. He would prefer that the new city

should be regarded as the symbol of Jehovah's will and appointment. Let it be looked upon as the home of the Temple and the heart of the nation. There is a double motive in the worship he orders and leads, answering to the two divisions of the Decalogue. Self-love like his is combined with the love of God and of His people.

The primary motive, expressed in the first and fourth and last verses, is love to Jehovah. The supreme reason why Israel should pay respect to Jerusalem is the fact that it contains the Temple. "Because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek thy good." His service must be supported; and it is therefore necessary to honour, maintain, and frequent the holy city which contains His altars. "O Lord our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth!" (Psalm viii. 1).

The other wing of worship is love of the brethren. Would that all national songs breathed the religious spirit of these popular and patriotic lyrics! What the sanctuary is to Jerusalem, the sacred city is to the nation. It is the head of the kingdom, of which the tribes are the members. Their unity depends on their loyalty to the common capital; and its welfare is the measure of their prosperity. Let Jerusalem be secure and blest, and the population generally will be safe and happy. "They shall prosper that love thee. . . . For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee."

Reference seems to be made to this psalm in "the word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the moun-

tain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isa. ii. 1-3). The prophecy is fulfilled, as in other respects, so in the use of this psalm by more than descendants of Israel. This song of David is now a Christian hymn chanted in translations and paraphrases throughout the general Church, and is thus itself a prediction accomplished. As the Scriptures show, for the earthly Jerusalem we have the heavenly, David's Lord for David, a greater than Solomon for his son, and in place of the judges under Israel's monarch the apostles of Jesus Christ (Isa. ix. 7; Matt. xix. 28; Luke i. 32, 33; John v. 22).

While attached to Judah or Benjamin, Ephraim or Manasseh, think highly of united Israel. They equally uphold Church and State, in the best sense, who belong to whatever true part of the spiritual temple, and scrupulously join their brethren and companions in harmonious religious services. There is no harm in the caravan, as it proceeds, breaking up into companies of kindred spirits. If the members of the several groups are drawn by particular congeniality, yet the divisions have their attraction to one another, and to a common aim and Lord, and, united while separate, form the pilgrim-host, and move onwards as a powerful whole. The Lord of David provides every class of His subjects with Songs of Degrees and other offerings, and summons all to His city and temple. For the three Hebrew festivals, we have Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide. In our weekly Sabbath, we celebrate at once the nativity and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the descent of the Holy Ghost. Keeping the concentrated feast every Lord's Day, we especially do so on the Sunday of Sundays crowned with the sacramental service. In the prayers and praises, lessons

and sermons, of our customary place of worship, we enter our Jerusalem, and ascend to the house of the Lord our God. Happy they who stand awhile within the gates before they penetrate to the heart of the city, who make their pause of preparation before they go into Jehovah's nearer presence.

As the Child Jesus accompanied Mary and Joseph to the Passover, and very likely repeated this psalm on the way, so should the youthful members of Christian families be taught the song, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." Accepting the help of pious teachers when necessary, yet fathers and mothers ought not to abdicate their own authority and influence. Let them be able to say, when they appear with their children in the congregation,

> "We bring them, Lord, in thankful hands,
> And yield them up to Thee."

Of the Sunday School a most important feature is the care with which its self-denying officers marshall for worship those of their scholars whose parents have no sittings for them in the sanctuary, and conduct them to their allotted benches in an orderly manner and in good time, and, by turns remaining with them, show them how to join in prayer and praise, how to use the Holy Bible, and how to listen to God's messenger. And nothing is more creditable to the choir than their wish and endeavour to learn their pieces beforehand, and, instead of practising, execute them in the hour of united worship. It is the duty of all to prepare themselves as much as possible before visiting the sanctuary.

The proper atmosphere of worship is charity. Our feet should stand within the gates of Jerusalem while we con-

sider, before going onwards to the tabernacle or temple, whether our hearts are right with our neighbours. The devotion of the unloving is a blemished sacrifice. They are in a Christian assembly like the man without a wedding garment at the marriage feast. Christ's word never dies: "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matt. v. 23, 24).

It is pleasant to have our own place of worship, and in it our own pew, and to be connected with religious people among whom we feel at home; but in our pious attachments we must guard against schism and selfishness. While we rightly say, "In Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship," we must be able with truth to add, "We know what we worship." Praying for the peace of the Church to which we belong, in the sense of only providing for our own tranquillity and comfort, is confining charity in a cage or prison. Jerusalem is not a conventicle, but a catholic city, our neighbour's as well as ours; and the sanctuary is neither his nor our house only, but the house of the Lord. Let us go up into the temple to pray, not merely for our personal benefit, but for the happiness of mankind, and the glory of the Most High. "For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek thy good."

On the silvery wings of this psalm, the soul ascends to heaven. "There remaineth a rest to the people of God;" and we find it delightful to remind one another, in this and similar songs, that we are going up to the eternal Sabbath-festival. Of the Jerusalem below not one stone will be left,

because not one will any longer be needed; but above us is an indestructible city with an everlasting temple. It may be said, as of the body, so of the consecrated edifice which we frequent for united worship, "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." In joyful religious services, our feet already stand within the gates of the celestial city. Suppose the earnest over, and the reality come. "There is but a step between me and death." I pass within the gates. I leave them. I go, with other triumphant pilgrims round me, and with angels for my musicians, along the golden street, to the imperishable house of my Heavenly Father. I use this song of completed ascents on the top of the flight to the door of the temple which will never be destroyed. It is my last and highest degree, my step into eternal glory.

Are we worse off than others? There are magnificent fanes in the Egyptian cities; and the Israelites have only a moveable tent in the wilderness. The Philistines own splendid temples; and the Lord's people possess but a tabernacle. It was a glorious edifice which Solomon erected; but Zerubbabel and Joshua see only its ruins, and Nehemiah sighs over an unfinished restoration. While some worship in cathedrals, others have to content themselves with the plainest meeting-houses. Robust neighbours seem happy as the day is long; but my soul's tenement is rapidly giving way. Let me not complain. All these distinctions terminate. The remains and representations of Egyptian gods will be things dug up for English museums. Dagon will fall before the ark. The second temple will be more glorious than the first. Cathedrals are hovels compared with the sanctuary to which I am

ascending. Lazarus will feast in a superb mansion of his own in the celestial city.

It is a good work to invite others to join us in our Christian pilgrimage. We know not how blessed will be the result of our persuasively saying to the same people again and again, "Let us go into the house of the Lord." The invitation may be refused, and seem to be forgotten, time after time; but it will live in the ear, and will haunt the memory in dreams. One cannot read this psalm without detecting in it the voice of gratitude. Many are thankful in the recollection of those whose advice and example led them to the sanctuary. The Christian mother of Gregory Nazianzen often begged her pagan husband to join the Lord's people in their worship, but had to go without him for a long time. At last her remembered words were irresistible music to his spirit. In a dream, he repeated the first verse of the Psalm, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." The opposite had been the fact; but the dream would come to pass. Such happiness was soon his lot. He felt a longing to accept the Christian religion, and was soon able, when wide awake, to say the same words with literal truth. "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house: they will be still praising Thee" (Psalm lxxxiv. 4).

I am always in tune to rejoice,
And to mingle my spirit and voice
With as many as utter the word,
Let us visit the house of the Lord.

In thy gates, O Jerusalem bright,
Have our feet often stood with delight,
And again shall they measure the way,
Till within them enchanted we stay.

Where there once was not much to attract,
Is Jerusalem built and compact;
Where the dwellings were meagre and few,
Is a city created anew.

Her imposing solemnities draw,
In agreement with Israel's law,
All the tribes with fraternal accord,
To give thanks to the name of the Lord.

David's right to the sceptre is clear,
For the seats of his judges are here;
And his Son on a permanent throne
Shall for ever be honour'd alone.

For the peace of Jerusalem pray:
May they thrive who exult in thy sway;
In thy bulwarks may safety be found,
In thy palaces plenty abound.

For the sake of my country and kin,
Let me bless thee thy temple within;
For the home of the Lord and His name,
Be thy good my continual aim.

'Tis the glory of God that is thine;
And thy festal repose is a sign
Of the rest for His people in store
When their heavenward journey is o'er.

Happy they who with patience of love
Urge their way to the Salem above!
They shall see in His beauty their King,
And His triumphs immortally sing.

IV.

THE SUPPLIANT EYE.

"1. Unto Thee lift I up mine eyes,
O Thou that dwellest in the heavens.
2. Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters,
And as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress;
So our eyes wait upon the LORD our God,—
Until that He have mercy upon us.
3. Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us:
For we are exceedingly filled with contempt.
4. Our soul is exceedingly filled
With the scorning of those that are at ease,
And with the contempt of the proud."

—PSALM cxxiii.

SINCE the time when it was produced by its now unknown author, when was not this hymn of hope a favourite with God's people? The experience of the Church is essentially alike in different dispensations and ages, and its words in one period represent its situation and express its spirit in another. The pensive individual might use this form of meditation and prayer with comfort and edification in view of his private distresses; the tuneful company might profitably beguile the way to or from Jerusalem with its plaintive cry; and it was fit to be chanted in the courts of Zion in the name of the Church universal. After the afflicted pilgrims of Israel in their successive generations, troubled Christians have repeated it in all countries; and

it still describes the griefs and aspirations of the tempted servants of the Lord as, in their various degrees, they "climb the steep ascent to heaven."

When the Jews who had returned from captivity were rebuilding their city and temple, first under Zerubbabel and Joshua, and afterwards under Nehemiah, they were interfered with by the dwellers in Samaria, who made themselves Pagans or Israelites as they thought their interests required. "The adversaries of Judah and Benjamin," pretending to be their friends and brethren, at first proposed to join them in their arduous undertaking. "They came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto Him since the days of Esar-haddon King of Assur, which brought us up hither. But Zerubbabel, and Joshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel," and subsequently Nehemiah and his associates, knowing too well what their religion amounted to and their offer was worth, would not let their time-serving rivals take the lead, the only part they would consent to take, in a patriotic and pious work which they had done nothing to originate, to which their hearts were not truly inclined, and which their idolatrous preferences and habits would desecrate, mar and defeat. As they might not have any advantage or credit in the restoration, the pagan-minded "people of the land" determined as much as they could to annoy and hinder the whole-hearted "children of the captivity." They not only directly molested them, but wrote to Artaxerxes King of Persia, telling him that the returned Jews were rebellious and ambitious in their designs, and would refuse to pay him tribute so soon as their strong buildings should be completed, and referring him to historical records for proof that they were always an obstinate and defiant nation

(Ezra iv. 4-24). Having succeeded in interrupting and delaying the enterprise, and knowing themselves secure in their sycophancy towards the ruling Paganism, one generation after another, they poured triumphant contempt and derision on the injured Israelites. The chronicler of the struggling patriots says:—"They laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king? . . . What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? . . . Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall. Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head" (Ezra iv. 1-3; Neh. ii. 19, 20; iv. 1-4). Such was the wearisome distress that seems to have occasioned the psalm, of which the closing words are, "For we are exceedingly filled with contempt. Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud."

This was not the only occasion in the progress of the Church of God, when His servants were tempted by people equally troublesome, whether pretending to be friends or proving themselves enemies. It was not even an exceptional instance. Cain would have the sacrificing his own way, or vent his wrath on Abel. If Joseph refused to act as they did, his brethren would do him mischief. Because our Lord Jesus could not be a tool, He was made a victim. His countrymen wanted Him above all things to show Himself the Son of God and King of Israel, and yet charged Him with blasphemy in their ecclesiastical court, and accused Him before the bar of Rome as a pretender. In every succeeding age the protesting and conservative faithful, the

heart and bone of the undying Church, have been first courted, and then bantered and baffled by their worldly-minded and semi-heathen neighbours. It is still the case that they who decline to walk in the counsel of the ungodly are summoned and ill-treated before the seat of the scornful. Exerting themselves to build up God's city and temple, Christians are always molested by a mixed population. The world about and among them, divided by rival idolatries, is united in jealousy, hatred, and scorn of the true Israel. The Samaritans will join the working Church, if in so doing they may carnally benefit themselves; but when their help, which would be ruin, is not accepted, they unscrupulously hinder, misrepresent, and despise God's children. Never of the Church, they are for or against it, as their earthly whims and interests prevail. "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. iii. 12).

Considering the afflictions of the righteous, the fool may say in his heart, "There is no God"; and the frantic charge Him with being blind or indifferent to His people's interests and rights; but the wise and sober do not forget that the Supreme Being, perfectly knowing what is best for those whom He is training for eternal life, prescribes and measures sorrows. We are taught by this song of the pilgrims to recognise His watchful Providence in calamities and perils. Not only His bountiful, protecting, and saving hand, but His correcting and ruling hand must be regarded. In ancient times, when the master or mistress inflicted manual chastisement, to be under the hand meant, not only to be dependent, but to be subject, governed, and controlled (Gen. xvi. 6-9). The human hand is liable to err, and too often lifted in selfishness, jealousy, spite, and pride; but our heavenly Father's hand punishes with such wise purposes and good results, that they whom He smites have

reason to kiss His quickening and wholesome rod. If He ever permits wrong, He is always doing right.

The angel of the Lord who advised Hagar to return to her mistress, and submit herself under her hands, much more counsels us to be submissive to Jehovah. The song we are considering breathes the uncomplaining spirit of the faithful Church or saint in any circumstances of humiliation and distress. The contumely of the profane and cruel Samaritans is hard to bear, say the voices we hear therein; but we look beyond the staff that smites us, and, seeing it wielded by the hand of God, own that all His dealings with us are righteous. Sigh and cry we must, but we will not murmur. Our adversity is not so bitter as we deserve, and we bow to Jehovah's justice. Not thus do the afflicted always speak. In their looks, and even with their lips, they sometimes fretfully contend that they never did anything to merit severity from God's hand. His attached and dutiful servants believe that they need all He lets them suffer, confess that there is not one stroke too many, and praise Him for every pain. The continued echo of the true Church is, "Thy will be done!" Holy lawgivers, psalmists, prophets and apostles, dead ages since, yet mingle their ever-living voices in deep music thus:—"Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground" (Job v. 6). "We are appointed thereunto" (1 Thess. iii. 3). "I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me" (Psalm cxix. 75). "When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" (1 Cor. xi. 32). "Happy is the man whom God correcteth" (Job v. 17; Deut. viii. 5; Psalm xciv. 12; Prov. iii. 11, 12; Heb. xii. 5, 6). He chastens us "for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness" (Heb. xii. 10).

The first of these Psalms was a cry to the Lord from the midst of enemies. In the second the pilgrim was cheered by the sight of the holy hills in the distance. In the third he was blessed with a nearer view of Mount Zion and the Temple. Now from God's footstool of hills and altars he looks up into the face of the Master. "Unto Thee lift I up mine eyes, O Thou that dwellest in the heavens."

We see a sufferer in the attitude of appeal for mercy, with raised arms, face upturned, beseeching eye, and trembling voice. "Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that He have mercy upon us. Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us." Beneath the righteous hand of the Almighty, how much better such a spirit than that of resistance and rebellion! It is the very disposition the Divine Master would evoke. It is the beginning of the perfect cure intended in the severe measures of the Good Physician. It is following the wholesome advice which heavenly wisdom uniformly gives. "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray" (James v. 13). In addition to the case before us, we find on record many instances of humble supplication beneath God's chastening hand (Psalm xviii. 6; 2 Kings xx. 1-5; 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13; Matt. xxvi. 39; 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9). All the smitten servants of the Lord, Whose mercy as well as righteousness endures for ever, have cried to Him for pity and relief. "Lord, in trouble have they visited Thee; they poured out a prayer when Thy chastening was upon them" (Isa. xxvi. 16).

The submissive and supplicating servant relies on his Master's ability and willingness to help and save. "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned

against Him, until He plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: He will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold His righteousness" (Micah vii. 9). This spirit of trust in the Lord of all is expressed in the opening verse. It is of little use looking round or away. "The eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth" (Prov. xvii. 24). On no side, near or far, are there men disposed to deliver me. If they had the will, they lack the power. Therefore, I look up. "Unto Thee lift I up mine eyes, O Thou that dwellest," or "sittest," "in the heavens," above my loftiest scorners, superior to my strongest foes. "The Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven: His eyes behold, His eyelids try, the children of men" (Psalm xi. 4). "Our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased" (Psalm cxv. 3). This trust, as all the song implies, while thankfully acknowledging dependence, humbly asserts a claim. In old time the servant might call upon his master to take up his cause against any who did him wrong (Exod. xxi. 32). Saints confide in Him Whom they serve, not only to withdraw His hand from punishing them, but to raise it in their defence. "Our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that He have mercy upon us." "Shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him?" (Luke xviii. 7, 8). The tempest of scorn and oppression rends the canvas, floods the deck, tosses and shakes the vessel; but He Whom winds and seas obey is with us, and at His word, in His good time, there will be settled and propitious weather. "O Lord my God, in Thee do I put my trust: save me from all them that persecute me, and deliver me" (Psalm vii. 1). He answers, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid" (Matt. xiv. 27). "Fear not, only believe" (Mark v. 36). "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the

world" (John xvi. 33). "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?" (Psalm cxviii. 6).

"The God that rules on high,
That all the earth surveys,
That rides upon the stormy sky,
And calms the roaring seas;

This awful God is ours,
Our Father and our love;
He will send down His heavenly powers,
To carry us above."

Harassed, hindered, and disappointed, yet, being where God would have them, and striving to honour Him Whose providence had brought them back to the home of their fathers, the returned Jews were not altogether unhappy. The psalm begins with a note of holy gladness, and yields throughout this pleasant testimony, "Sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing" (2 Cor. vi. 10). From sins and sufferings the submissive, devout and reliant find in their Heavenly Master's watchful mercy a refuge of present blessedness. Singing His will and power to save, they triumph in the heat of conflict, and are joyful in the depths of adversity. The thought of His merciful might, ever ready to succour His servants, has made the Church, in all stages of her wonderful history, laugh at her impotent enemies. Conspicuous among the inspired sentences embroidered on her glorious banners are such as this: "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God" (Psalm cxlvi. 5). His believing and loving people "count it all joy when," for His sake, they "fall into divers temptations" (James i. 2; 1 Peter i. 6); are "exceeding joyful" and "glory in tribulations" (Rom. v. 3; 2 Cor. vii. 4); "rejoice that they" are "counted worthy to suffer

shame for His name" (Acts v. 41); and make their chains in the deep prison clank time through the dark and sleepless night to their continual songs of praise to God their Saviour (Acts xvi. 25). In whatever outward misery, "blessed are all they that put their trust in Him" (Psalm ii. 12).

The spirit of the psalm, in its fulness and product, is obedience. As the Scriptures have shown us, the Divine Master has purposes in the strokes of His holy hand. "When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isa. xxvi. 9). Even in this aspect of trouble, we may point with reverence to the Saviour's pattern. "Though He was a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered" (Heb. v. 8). The Supreme Master, while inflicting punishment, graciously states His motive and meaning, and blesses His servant with corresponding counsel. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous, therefore, and repent" (Rev. iii. 19). From a choice tree, rooted in humility, branching in devotion, spreading its leaves to catch the sunshine, rain and dew of heaven, and blossoming in trust and hope and joy, what fruit but righteousness can be expected? Bad trees may give promise for a season, but speedily yield to blight and decay. The Lord complains of those whose repentance is hollow: "In the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us;" but at no other time, and with no resolution of amendment (Jer. ii. 27). "When He slew them, then they sought Him: and they returned and enquired early after God. And they remembered that God was their Rock, and the High God their Redeemer. Nevertheless they did flatter Him with their mouth, and they lied unto Him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with Him, neither were they steadfast in His covenant" (Psalm

lxxviii. 34-37). The true servant of God, on the contrary, is not too proud to learn the lesson of suffering, but diligently studies it, sincerely and earnestly vows to carry it out, gladly strives henceforth to obey the governing and guiding hand of the Master, and sings to the Lord as he serves Him, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes." "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept Thy word" (Psalm cxix. 71, 67).

Let those who have been delivered from the bondage of sin, and, in spite of the worldly and scornful, are doing their part to build the city and temple of God, be encouraged. The hand of the Lord is in the trouble incurred by them on account of religion, and but smites that it may bless His servants. In the present world only their "soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud." There will come a happy end, to which their temporal suffering is made to conduce. When the service of God seems to be stopped by the refusal of so-called help that would be really a hindrance, there is presented a choice of two evils: one of compromise, leading down from religion to the portals of hell; the other of circumstance, clinging to the saint so long as it may in the upward path to the glorious gate of heaven which it cannot enter. Contempt endured for the sake of righteousness, instead of being a fatal obstacle, is virtually an assistance in its progress and to its reward. "All things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. viii. 28).

Let slippery heathen people take warning, who offer the Church the alternative of pretended help, if they may have the world along with them, or malicious opposition, if it will not accept the condition. The hand of the Lord now seems to let them alone. They are "at ease," free from trouble,

and unconcerned for the afflicted, and "proud," like the Pharisees who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." But the day is near, when the situation of time-servers and that of the servants of God shall be reversed; when the scornful, now "at ease," shall be "exceedingly filled with contempt," and the pious, at present calling for mercy, shall be truly at ease; when the righteous Lord will take His hand off His corrected servants, and lay it heavily upon their proud enemies. The same almighty hand that chastises saints for their profit, shall drive their hypocritical offenders to infamy and perdition. An agony of prayer will turn out a sure prophecy: "Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up Thine hand: forget not the humble. Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God? he hath said in his heart, Thou wilt not require it. Thou hast seen it; for Thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with Thy hand" (Psalm x. 12-14). The Lord's hand is destruction or salvation.

Not only are the eyes of the loyal servant towards the hand of his master till it shall cease to smite, or till it shall give the signal for punishment to end. The Eastern superior, sparing in words, directs his attendants and agents by signs; and they are his best servants, and least likely to incur sorrow, who, not from fear but love, are swift to notice and obey the slightest movements of his speaking hand. The heart must be in the eyes that wait upon Jehovâh.

'Twere vain to look around to those
 Who on my level stand:
Were they my friends who are my foes,
 I could not trust their hand:
But life to save they have no will;
They boast the waiting power to kill.

I upward lift beseeching eyes,
 Above their lofty pride,
To Thee Who sittest in the skies,
 And can'st their aims deride:
Thy faithful hand, which smites to heal,
In their destroying wrath I feel.

As masters, when their bondmen say
 In looks that they repent,
And, when with tears their maidens pray,
 As mistresses relent,
Our eyes implore the Lord our God
To lay aside His righteous rod.

Have mercy on Thy servants, Lord!
 Affliction is our due,
And brings to mind Thy slighted word:
 Yet let Thy pity view
The triumph of our carnal foes,
The fulness of our cup of woes.

Our soul with the contempt is bowed
 Of those that are at ease,
And with the scorning of the proud,
 Who seek their lusts to please:
From servile gloom Thou didst release;
Thy freemen bless with smiling peace.

Thy hand will graciously reward,
 When all my work is done;
My heart is towards Thy hand, O Lord,
 To serve Thee as a son;
Thy hand shall always give the sign;
My will shall be to honour Thine.

V.

THE LORD ON OUR SIDE.

"1. If it had not been the LORD Who was on our side,
Now may Israel say;
2. If it had not been the LORD Who was on our side,
When men rose up against us:
3. Then they had swallowed us up quick,
When their wrath was kindled against us:
4. Then the waters had overwhelmed us,
The stream had gone over our soul:
5. Then the proud waters had gone over our soul.
6. Blessed be the LORD,
Who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth.
7. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers:
The snare is broken, and we are escaped.
8. Our help is in the name of the LORD,
Who made heaven and earth."

—PSALM CXXIV.

THIS jubilant song speaks of a sudden peril and narrow escape, and praises God for the great deliverance. We take it to be, according to its title, a Psalm of David, not a hymn founded upon his character, writings, and history. It is full of his force and fire, suits not a few situations in which he shared the lot of Israel as herein described, and contains expressions parallel with words occurring in compositions of which he is the undoubted author.

The danger seems to have been a cunning surprise (Psalm lvi. 5, 6). After the general reference, "when men rose up against us," four figures are used or suggested, picturing

what took place. The adventure is first compared to a startling earthquake, shaking houses, and opening its mouth to devour men, women, and children. "Then they had swallowed us up quick," as Korah and his adherents were buried alive in a moment (Numb. xvi. 31-33; Psalm lv. 15; lvi. 1, 2; Prov. i. 12). It is next likened, either to the angry ocean, lifting its roaring waves, and uncovering its hungry depths, or to a sudden torrent from the high lands, rushing swiftly down in swelling volume, till the hollow which was dry, and in which it was pleasant to encamp, proves too shallow to hold the muddy flood sweeping on tumultuously. "Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul: then the proud waters had gone over our soul." The destruction of Pharaoh and his host may have been in the poet's mind (Psalm xviii. 4). The third comparison is to what the son of Jesse had witnessed in his shepherd life, the stealthy run of the wolf or jackal upon the flock, the seizure of the lamb by the ravenous lion or bear. "Blessed be the Lord, Who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth." The last similitude is a bird caught and fluttering in the net. "Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped."

It is as impossible as unnecessary to fix upon the particular circumstances of the surprise and peril. Enough it is to infer that the country's danger was David's, and his distress that of the people. There was a personal crisis in a public struggle. The figures employed describe the situation of God's people in any place or age, when they suddenly find themselves overtaken by calamity as if in the earthquake's jaws, when sorrow bursts upon them like the mountainous wave on a ship, when floods of ungodly men make them afraid, when they seem to feel in their flesh the

teeth of slander and malice, when they are unexpectedly entangled in perplexities and difficulties like the bird in the snare. So the early believers in the Messiah were troubled by Jewish and Roman persecutors, saints in many lands have been worried by Papal wolves, the evangelists of the last century were mobbed by worldly men, and the Christians in Madagascar and British India were more recently assailed by heathen foes. So the man of business is smitten by misfortune, disease springs upon its unsuspecting victim, and a family is diminished by death. So the convicted sinner is stricken by the terrors of God's law, the convert has to fight against the world, the flesh and the devil, and the righteous soul is in heaviness through manifold temptations. All the cry is, what can be done? how may we escape? who will help us?

The psalm is a song of deliverance. Every one is a saved person. We have not forgotten the time when the foundations gave way, and we were sinking into the earth; when we could carry no canvas, and the tearing winds and assaulting waves seemed getting the victory; when the paw of disease was upon us, and we looked up to the keen teeth and fiery eyes of the destroyer; when our feet were fast in the net, and our feathers ruffled and loose. We remember the moment when the ground ceased to shake beneath us, and we stood upon a rock; when the wind changed, the waters fell, and the ship sailed into harbour; when the wolf resigned its prey, and the released lamb rested in green pastures; when the snare was broken, before the arrival of the fowler, and the flown bird recovered itself amid the sheltering trees. All are free in a higher sense. We were on the brink of everlasting ruin; we were caught in the whirlwind of almighty wrath; we were in the jaws of eternal death; the snares of hastening hell were about

our spirits. Then without exception we were redeemed from destruction; and hence we are now breathing calmly, and hoping to be safe for ever.

If Christians, we can profitably call to mind many escapes from evil. In the dreadful hour of the enemy, and the power of darkness, hell from beneath moved to receive us; the black waves were rolling against us; it was as if some spell were forcing us into the nearer mouth of the gazing serpent; we heard the clanking of chains about to be locked upon our souls; but we were delivered from the dire temptation, and at this moment our faith is strong, our hope exultant, and our heart in heaven.

It becomes us carefully to trace blessings to their source. The poet is less particular to describe the danger and the escape than to proclaim and praise the great Deliverer. We did not save ourselves. It was not the stamp of our foot that quieted the earthquake, not the sound of our voice that stilled the tempest, not the might of our arm that slew the lion, not the power of our hand that rent the network. It was not any creature except as sent by God, armed with a portion of His strength, and for the sake of Jesus Christ, that in any degree accomplished our salvation. Moses thus cautioned Israel: "It shall be when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land which He sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, and houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; then beware lest thou forget the Lord, Which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage" (Deut. vi. 10-12). Nebuchadnezzar was degraded for saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have

built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" (Dan. iv. 30). Of Herod it is written, "Immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory" (Acts xii. 23). But for the Lord, he would never have been "arrayed in royal apparel," the king of Babylon would never have ascended the throne, the Hebrews would never have triumphed over the Egyptian oppressor, and never should we have been "in green pastures" and "beside the still waters."

The psalm was written and chanted to give God the glory. The height of its meaning is, "Blessed be the Lord" (Psalm xxviii. 6; xxxi. 21). He is the only Protector: and His protection is all-sufficient. "If it had not been the Lord Who was on our side," remaining with us always, "now may Israel say; if it had not been the Lord Who was on our side, when men rose up against us: then"—what would have happened to us? Instead of being delivered, we should have been destroyed. "Then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us: then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul: then the proud waters had gone over our soul." We were not in the battle without our Captain. We were not in the tossing ship without our Pilot. We were not forsaken of the Lord of all. "Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, Thou stillest them" (Psalm lxxxix. 9). "He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters" (Psalm xviii. 16). "The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast Thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God" (Jonah ii. 6, 7). Thou hast kept Thy gracious promise: "When thou passest

through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee" (Isa. xliii. 2). "If it had not been the Lord Who was on our side, then" the cruel beasts would have reddened their mouths with our blood, and crushed our bones. "There is a generation, whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men" (Prov. xxx. 14; Gal. v. 15). "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter v. 8). "Blessed be the Lord, Who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth." "If it had not been the Lord Who was on our side, then" we should have been held fast, till taken by the enemy of souls. "Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken," by the Lord, "and we are escaped." "If it had not been the Lord Who was on our side, then" we should have yielded in the dark and trying hour, and demons would have exulted over our fall and ruin. Blessed be His name, written in history, sculptured in works, spelt in promises, pronounced in deeds, repeated in deliverances, chanted by all the Church. "Our help is in the name of the Lord, Who made heaven and earth" (Psalm cxxi. 2). "Salvation to our God Which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb" (Rev. vii. 10). He still was for us, God the Father; among us, God the Son; within us, God the Spirit. (See Littledale.) "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel: the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them" (Numb. xxiii. 21). "Behold, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke xvii. 21).

The same song is not always seasonable. Perhaps existing circumstances make it very difficult to obey the summons to praise God for His saving might and mercy. "Now may

Israel say"; or, "Let Israel now say." How can we now sing this song of praise and triumph? What present salvation from the Lord have we to celebrate? We are in the heat of a conflict that has come upon us unawares. The ground which we trusted is heaving. The billows with which we played are raging. The lion we thought tame is roaring. We are involved in a snare which we did not suspect to be laid for us. People whom we considered friends are eager to "bite and devour" us. "Lord, how are they increased that trouble me? many are they that rise up against me. Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God" (Psalm iii. 1, 2). Is this any time to sing? What shall we do? Trust and pray, that the Lord may do all; and then shall you heartily join in repeating His praises.

They speak falsely who say there is no help for us in God. The psalm beginning with that reference to taunts and lies ends, like all healthy religious meditation, with a note of confidence: "Salvation belongeth unto the Lord: Thy blessing is upon Thy people." Unbelieving fear must not be allowed to hinder the grace of God which brings salvation. Reflecting upon His promises, power and faithfulness, upon the deliverances He has wrought for the true Israel in all ages and circumstances, and upon His wise and merciful dealings even with ourselves, we at length exclaim: "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?" (Psalm cxviii. 6). "What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee. In God I will praise His word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me" (Psalm lvi. 3, 4, 10, 11). Enemies may spring upon us, trials cross our path, friends expire in our sight, and the king of terrors show himself; but "the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations"

(2 Peter ii. 9; 1 Cor. x. 13). Our continual Defender will save us from death, crown us with immortal glory, present our friends to us again, and Himself be our joy for ever. "Our help is in the name of the Lord, Who made heaven and earth."

This Psalm is a fine example of the blessedness of that trust in God which first expresses itself in prayer. Jonah says, "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto Thee, into Thine holy temple" (Jonah ii. 7). So David prayed, "Let Thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, according as we hope in Thee" (Psalm xxxiii. 22). "Let not the water-flood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me" (Psalm lxix. 14-16). "Send Thine hand from above; rid me, and deliver me out of great waters" (Psalm cxliv. 7). "Be merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up. . . . When I cry unto Thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me" (Psalm lvi. 1, 9; xxxi. 22). From the fragrant censer of believing prayer bursts the clear flame of cheerful praise. It was because David chanted psalms of confident supplication, that he was able to sing songs of salvation and thanksgiving. "Blessed be the Lord, because He hath heard the voice of my supplications" (Psalm xxviii. 6).

> "We'll praise Him for all that is past,
> And trust Him for all that's to come."

Observing anyone getting near to the verge of a precipice, or approaching a wild beast's lair, or stepping towards a lurking serpent, who would not shout to alarm him, and urge him to fly for life? The Lord is for us, in the sense that He graciously warns us of danger. In the Holy Bible, in the preaching of His ministers, and in His Spirit's inward

cautions, He calls the wandering to consider where they are going, and proceed no farther in so dangerous a direction, but hasten back to a place of security. We may not see any peril, when our safety is to let our Saviour see for us. We only see beautiful shrubs and shadowy trees. He Who is on our side sees the foe behind them in ambush. We only see the pleasing bait on a bosom of shining grass and showy flowers. Our constant Friend sees there the hidden trap. We only see the smooth turf, inviting our feet, tired of ruts and stones. He Who is yet for us sees the pit artfully concealed. We only see the glancing water and the smiling sky. Our Keeper sees the hurrying squall, and cries, Beware; take in sail. "Save yourselves from this untoward generation" (Acts ii. 40).

The danger we are in is that of being swallowed up, dead or alive. They who sin ignorantly, looking upon idleness, pleasure, riches and honour as proper objects of worship, are being swallowed up dead. If we are not the Lord's, who have been taught the way of salvation, we have torn ourselves from Him. If we are Satan's, we have sinned consciously, entering into temptation. They must resist every inclination to what they know to be evil, who would not find their own place between the teeth of the destroyer. When any worship the world's idols, from fear of reproach and persecution, aware that they offend God, they are being swallowed up quick, like the bird, which has wings to escape from the serpent, yet in very fright flutters into its open jaws (Luke xii. 47).

It is folly to boast of natural powers. Wings may take their owners too near the flame, may place them within reach of the lion's paw, may entangle them in the spider's web or in the fowler's snare. What pride has a bird in its feathers, when once caught in the silken thread, or fast in

the golden wire? However splendid their endowments, only God can deliver souls from evil, and keep them free.

If we would, we cannot drive the Lord from us, cannot elude His omniscient eye, cannot escape His almighty hand. He is ever with us, either as with the Jews or with the Samaritans; as for us in mercy, or against us in justice; as holding us in custody, or blessing us in service; as punishing us with evil-doers, or approving and maintaining our cause, and accomplishing our salvation. Infinitely better it is to have Him side with us against the wicked, than ourselves to side with the wicked against Jehovah. In the latter case, transgressors in multitudes might take our rebellious part; but they would all be defeated by Him Who smote the adversaries of David, and of Ezra and Nehemiah, entombed Korah and his clamorous followers, engulphed Pharaoh and his military host, and overwhelmed the ancient world with the flood. In the former case, though thousands of sinners oppose our Zionward pilgrimage, we shall be able to laugh at them in this exulting song of David, which would have equally suited Moses, Lot, or Noah, and in which the Jews rapturously triumphed over their Samaritan enemies.

If, when in swift surprise they rose,
 Let rescued Israel thankful say,
The Lord had left us to our foes,
 How then had gone the direful day?

Had not the Father for us felt,
 Had not the Son among us been,
Had not the Spirit in us dwelt,
 What would the watching world have seen?

If God had not been on our side,
 Then, where we unsuspecting lay,
The torrent of resistless pride
 Had swept our tents of ease away.

The waters had gone o'er our soul,
And mock'd our unavailing strife,
Nor ceased in swelling rage to roll
Till they had quench'd the Church's life.

Bless'd be the Lord, Who would not give
To hungry teeth their startled prey,
But bade His dying people live,
And show'd our flying feet the way.

Our soul was like a fluttering bird
Entrapp'd in toils it could not see:
The Lord His captured servants heard,
And broke the snare, and set us free.

Our help is in Jehovah's name,
Which promises and deeds express,
Whom heaven and earth their Source proclaim,
And saints and seraphs ever bless.

VI.

JEHOVAH OUR SHIELD.

"1. They that trust in the LORD shall be as Mount Zion,
Which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.
2. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem,
So the LORD is round about His people
From henceforth even for ever.
3. For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous;
Lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity.
4. Do good, O LORD, unto those that be good,
And to them that are upright in their hearts.
5. As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways,
The LORD shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity:
But peace shall be upon Israel."

—PSALM CXXV.

THERE is no reason to conclude that this psalm, of which the authorship is unknown, was specially composed for the Jews in view of their circumstances of exposure and danger from the time of their return from captivity till the walls of Jerusalem were reared by Nehemiah. It can only be said that it was eminently fitted for introduction into the little collection of melodies for pilgrims. The play in it is upon the three strings of danger and defence and duty; and every verse contains a word descriptive of those for whom the Songs of Degrees, new and old, were intended, and of the militant Church in every age and country. They are called Israel, the people of Jehovah, they that trust in the Lord,

the righteous, the good, the upright in their hearts. A hymn of comfort for such, it is a voice of warning for hypocrites and the unfaithful.

A picture is given of the danger to which the Church and individual saints are liable. "The lot of the righteous" is threatened by "the rod of the wicked," or, "of wickedness." Many rulers coveted the inheritance of Israel, from the time of David onwards. The sceptres of the Babylonians, Romans, and Mohammedans have been upon Zion, like the flail on the threshing-floor. What was signified in their assaults and successes? The rod of sin, in the power and authority of the outward oppressor, often answered to the ascendancy of iniquity in the heart of Jerusalem. The prevalence of spiritual wickedness within Israel attracted the earthly tyranny of heathenism outside. God was working in every instance, using the rods of wickedness for the probation and punishment of those who ought to have been righteous; and He still chastises sinners by means of sin, their own, inviting wrath, and that of aliens, inflicting it; thus extirpating iniquity, purifying and preserving the Church, and making unfaithfulness and apostacy praise Him.

But it is not principally as the punisher of sin that God is revealed in this psalm. It sings of Him as the Defender of Zion, and every citizen of faithful Jerusalem. Now and again the inhabitants, a harvest for the destroyer, have been swept away for their transgressions; but the mountain has remained, again to be covered with people. The Church at seasons declines, and sometimes seems almost at an end; but the Rock on which it is founded, "Jesus Christ, is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." The Temple, in its essence and strength; the saint, in his refuge and might, is "as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever."

With the exception of a space on the north, the Creator's hand has dug deep trenches around Jerusalem, and piled a rampart of hills beyond the circling valley. An approaching enemy may boast of being on a general level with the city, but must descend in sight of its watchers, and climb in the face of its waiting warriors, before he can reach its disdainful gates. Zion, the height of the central mountain, looks on the kindred mountains round, as a throned monarch reviewing his invincible army. Those guardian hills, of the same average height as that which culminates in the citadel of David, have been said to symbolize the Church's creature defenders,—its apostles, apologists, martyrs, and teachers; its vigilant host of ministering angels. Yet learned men are not the brightness and power of the New Jerusalem. "The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof" (Rev. xxi. 23). Neither are angels its supreme defence. When the Lord said to Moses, "I will send an angel before thee, for I will not go up in the midst of thee," His servant at length replied, "If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. For wherein shall it be known here that I and Thy people have found grace in Thy sight? is it not in that Thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and Thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth." The courage and life of Israel are in the Lord's promise, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest" (Exod. xxxiii. 2, 3, 14-16). Not in the hosts whom Jehovah marshals, but in the fact that it is He Who commands and uses them, lies the security of the Church. "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them" (Psalm xxxiv. 7). His care of His people outlives even the hills. Everlasting in comparison with other

natural objects, they are a fleeting shadow in contrast with Him from Whose face both earth and heaven will flee away. "Surely the mountain falling cometh to nought, and the rock is removed out of his place" (Job xiv. 18). "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee" (Isa. liv. 10). Whatever the character and number of the Church's creature-defenders, whether mountains, angels, or men, the Captain of the host must be Jehovah, or they are not a sufficient protection. Modern occupants of the earthly Jerusalem could not speak of the surrounding mountains, and the valley between them and the walls, or of the walls themselves, with the same military confidence as did the inhabitants in old time, when war was but an infant demon compared with the many-armed giant which now strikes bulwarks down and beats cities into heaps; but "the Lord is round about His people," as safe a shield as ever. "Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein: for I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her" (Zech. ii. 4, 5). "The glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams" (Isa. xxxiii. 21).

If Zion, looking down on populous Jerusalem, and over to the encompassing hills, is like a queen in the midst of her subjects and defenders, what is Olivet like on the east, higher than all the other hills outside, and commanding a view of the city? While Zion is regarded as representing the lifted brow and heart of the Church, Olivet may remind us of Israel's King, to Whom every institution and estate is tributary. It is especially, with its richly flowing oil, a symbol of the Spirit of the Lord, the Comforter. Why

should the saints be afraid? "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things" (1 John ii. 20). See in the royal citadel, with Salem at its foot, turning to Olivet, the Church appealing for protection to the Most High; and in the Mount of Olives, with its staff and retinue of lower hills, the ascending Lord engaging to bless His faithful people. He can save by many or by few, or without any to assist Him; and they who have Him for their Guardian are stronger than the most powerful adversaries. "Thus saith the Lord God of hosts, O My people that dwellest in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrian: he shall smite thee with a rod, and shall lift up his staff against thee, after the manner of Egypt. For yet a very little while, and the indignation shall cease, and Mine anger in their destruction. And the Lord of hosts shall stir up a scourge for him" (Isa. x. 24-26). "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth even for ever. For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous."

The sweet concluding note of the psalm, to linger in the ear, and live in the heart, is, "Peace shall be upon Israel." The prayer for the peace of Jerusalem in a preceding song has here its answer. This is what comes of serving the Lord, and sheltering in His defence. His is the only sceptre that bestows essential and abiding peace. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isa. lvii. 21; xlviii. 22). A usurper may snatch up a rod of wickedness, and excuse himself by exclaiming, "The empire is peace;" but he is soon proved to be mistaken. Such language is most fitting and true in the lips of Israel's King. Only against the wicked is the empire of Jehovah war. According to the Scriptures and historic fact, His rod gives theirs no peace. "A sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall

smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth" (Numb. xxiv. 17). "Thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian" (Isa. ix. 4). "For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous." Thus devouring the rods of His enemies, the Lord's sceptre is to His willing subjects a rule of peace. If it does not now cause calmness of circumstance in every case, yet at all times it confers tranquillity of soul, and eventually it will yield beautiful and glorious peace, outward as well as inward, for ever and ever. As the prophets foretold of Jesus Christ, the Apostle proclaims, and the Church or the believer experiences, "He is our Peace" (Eph. ii. 14; Isa. ix. 6, 7; xi. 1-9; Micah v. 2, 5; vii. 14).

With the music of danger and defence is blended the tune of duty. The people whom God engages to protect are they who "worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John iv. 24). Variously tabernacled and manifested, religion has always been spirit and life. It is as wrong to say that the piety of the Hebrews was all of it outward and ceremonial, as it would be to describe that of missioners and revivalists as only fitful and circumstantial. God's requirement has in all ages been, "Give Me thine heart" (Prov. xxiii. 26). Such laws as "Thou shalt not covet" were for the inner man (Exod. xx. 17). There was the breath of the soul in Zion's songs. "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name" (Psalm ciii. 1). We have but to glance at the history and present condition of the children of Jacob, to see that it is not the outward Church which God undertakes to preserve. From the rods of wickedness have fallen upon Jerusalem the most poisonous fruits of crime and sorrow, and it has declined again and again in the baneful shade of ruling error. The sceptres of

Chaldeans, Syrians, Romans, and Turks have only prevailed against the material city and the nation "stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears." The Great Builder has used the sword of the oppressor as a trowel in restoring and extending His spiritual temple. It is the express teaching of the psalm that they to whom the Lord does good are "those that be good," not only outwardly, in the sight of men, but inwardly, before Him "unto Whom all hearts be open." "Do good, O Lord, unto those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts." Strikingly in agreement with these words are many sacred sentences given from heaven in the same era. "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart" (Psalm lxxiii. 1). "My defence is of God, Which saveth the upright in heart" (Psalm vii. 10).

There is the anxiety of the pastor in this pilgrim song. The shepherd would keep his sheep from straggling. His distress is that all in Israel are not true Israelites. Two sorts of people, described by the poet, have ever been in the Church. The second class, instead of being at the trouble to "withstand in the evil day," will "put forth their hands unto iniquity." Rather than feel, they will follow the rod of the wicked. They will "turn aside unto their crooked ways," sooner than risk temporal and material interests. If they do not give themselves fully to the Egyptians or Philistines, Babylonians or Samaritans, they go far in compliance to gain their favour, and sometimes so far as to share in their plunder. Slipping from the King's highway into the tortuous by-paths of selfishness and compromise, they are without excuse. No sufferings in God's service are reasons for unfaithfulness and apostasy. His grace makes us able to drink whatever cup His providence administers. He adapts our trials to our strength,

and proportions our strength to our trials. "For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous; lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity." "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. x. 13). The way of escape is never crookedly parleying with false friends, but always direct obedience to the will of God. At the worst, it is death; and then the worst is best. Whatever may happen from the rod of the wicked, it is of the greatest moment to shun the wickedness of their rod. The treacherous and pliable exchange the lot of the righteous for the portion of evil-doers. "As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity." He said by Malachi, "Ye are departed out of the way. Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept My ways" (Mal. ii. 8, 9; Deut. ix. 16).

A foremost aspect of duty presented in the psalm is trust. "They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion." A tempest of persecution is a time for the Church or the saint to rely upon the sceptre of Jehovah. The storm will spend itself, and sunbeams again crown Zion. "The rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous." "Peace shall be upon Israel." As for the army, so for the soldier, the battle is hard. A saint may find it more easy to trust in the Lord for the Church's triumph, than for his own. While the host is victorious, the individual may be slain. There comes a crisis when obedience to the Lord's rule implies disobedience to the rod of the wicked. Now is faith's trying moment. God's

servant must fight or fly. He must trust in the Lord, or desert the Captain of his salvation. The blow is at first stunning. "Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning" (Psalm lxxiii. 12-14). But, says faith, recovering itself, we do not live for temporal ease and prosperity. There is a higher and everlasting world, in view of which we say to ourselves, to one another, and to persecutors and false advisers, "We ought to obey God rather than men' (Acts v. 29). Even if we fall, it is better to serve the Lord; for, were we to obey the tempter, we should more deeply fall; and when in obeying God we fall, we fall to rise. Death is the believer's victory. In his martyrdom is final safety. The individual escapes, as truly as the Church; and he is glorified for ever. To participate in the triumph of the cause of God, and that we may personally be saved, it behoves us to trust in Jehovah. When Jerusalem ceased to do so, her glory departed, and "she became weak, and like another city" (Horne). "Because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith" (Rom. xi. 20).

Again, we are reminded that faith finds expression and relief in prayer. It is because they humbly and chiefly speak to the Lord, that believers, in prospect of eternity, talk encouragingly to themselves and one another, and defiantly to their adversaries. The Saviour puts forth His loving hand, and receives to the ark of His presence and salvation the soul that confidently cries, "Do good, O Lord, unto those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts."

Is the Psalm for us a song of joy or a note of warning?

If we are good in motive and conduct, if we serve the Lord contentedly and perseveringly in the spirit of faith and prayer, if we accept our lot with Him as He orders it in the present world, not always ease and sunshine, but sometimes only peace of mind in a war of circumstances, then He will be our Defender and Deliverer, throwing from us the rod of the wicked, and keeping us to everlasting tranquillity, prosperity, and glory. "Peace shall be upon Israel." If, on the contrary, to arrest the stroke and buy the favour of the enemy, who will not be able to smite or smile much longer, but is already perishing beneath the Almighty's frown, we secretly associate with the ungodly, while nominally joined with the righteous; if we bend before the rod of sin while professing to submit to the sceptre of the Holy One; if we turn aside to crooked ways while pretending to be pilgrims to the Heavenly Zion; if we put forth our hands unto iniquity while wearing the uniform of religion,—then we choose the portion and incur the punishment of evil-doers. "As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity." The rebels aim to cast Him from the city, and sometimes seem to achieve their purpose, crucifying Jesus and stoning Stephen outside the walls; but do they triumph? The God of righteousness is not driven away, but expels the Jews themselves and the Romans from Jerusalem. However strong our situation, and whatever hopes we cherish, if we banish the Saviour from our hearts, He will not have us in His eternal city. Except to trust the Lord, "be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. iv. 6, 7).

The Lord their trust who make
 Shall like Mount Zion stand,
A throne which no assault can shake,
 No hostile host command.

As mountains stationed round
 Jerusalem defend,
The Lord the Church's shield is found
 Henceforth and to the end.

The wicked may insult
 The righteous in their lot,
And sin's retributive result
 Awhile their honour blot;

But no oppressor's rod
 Shall on their portion rest,
To drive away the peace of God
 From the devoted breast.

His grace shall give them strength
 His providence to bear;
His gracious providence at length
 Shall answer all their prayer.

Better resist and die
 Than parley with the foe:
Christ's soldiers have no need to fly,
 Or let their treasure go.

To those who practise right,
 Omniscient Lord, do well;
And let the true in heart delight
 Thy benefits to tell.

From duty's path who choose
 To crooked ways to turn,

The heritage of children lose,
And that of outcasts earn.

Their hopes, who leave the Lord,
Shall 'midst the wicked cease,
While faithful Israel's reward
Shall be abiding peace.

VII.

TEARS AND LAUGHTER.

"1. When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion,
We were like them that dream.
2. Then was our mouth filled with laughter,
And our tongue with singing:
Then said they among the heathen,
The LORD hath done great things for them.
3. The LORD hath done great things for us;
Whereof we are glad.
4. Turn again our captivity, O LORD,
As the streams in the south.
5. They that sow in tears
Shall reap in joy.
6. He that goeth forth and weepeth,
Bearing precious seed,
Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing,
Bringing his sheaves with him."

—PSALM CXXVI.

MANY a minister has stopped, in the course of a hymn, to ask the people to consider the meaning of what they were singing. There are stanzas which cannot be given out in a general congregation. It would be awful mockery for language only appropriate for saints at the door of heaven to be sung by sinners near the gate of hell. The inspired psalms are for use in the heart, the family, and the sanctuary to the end of time; but are all in a condition to repeat them with propriety and truth? The ode to be now examined was composed by some poet among the first company of Jews who returned after the seventy years' captivity, and

they who then felt their feet on the blessed ground upon which their forefathers had stood and worshipped in freedom, could not help adopting it; but if they had sent a copy to their brethren left behind, and told them to use it, would they not rather have caused them to hang their harps on the willows, and to sit down and weep by the rivers of Babylon? There could not be a fitter hymn for insertion in the collection of Songs of Degrees afterwards compiled for the annual festivals. As the pilgrims repeated it, when on their journey to or from Jerusalem, or when within its sacred walls, they would lose sight of their comparatively little toils and dangers, and see only their blessings, in thinking of the sorrows their captive ancestors had endured in the distant land, the labours and perils encountered by those of them who had ventured to come home, and the harassing treatment experienced by the returned patriots from contemptuous Samaritans and Persian officers when they were trying to restore the city and temple which their sons were now privileged to visit year by year. The words only suit the lips of such as live and act with reference to Jehovah's unsleeping providence and redeeming care. When remembering past deliverances, and looking for Divine help in the endeavour to escape from present troubles, either a God-fearing nation, or the holy Church, or any section of it, or sincere Christians individually, may adopt this psalm; but it is loud mockery for the unconverted, in their guilty state, and amid their evil undertakings, to chant the language of God's children.

The psalm describes the joy of the righteous. In the first three verses, it thankfully speaks, in general language, of the great deliverance, in effecting which, according to a prophecy by Isaiah a century and a half before, and a more recent prediction of Jeremiah, and as historically recorded

in the book of Ezra, God used Cyrus as His willing instrument (Isa. xliv. 28; xlv. 1-4; Jer. xxix. 10; xxxiii. 7-11; Ezra i. 1-4). The liberation of the captive Hebrews was a type of the redemption of the human race, and the return to Zion of such as improved their opportunity a figure of the salvation of believers. As God pitied the helpless Jews, carried away by the king of Babylon from Canaan, and, overthrowing Belshazzar, found them at length a royal deliverer who required no ransom from them, but even commanded that as they left for Jerusalem they should be laden with presents, so He took pity on mankind drawn by Satan from the Garden of Eden, and "raised up a Horn of Salvation for us in the house of His servant David,"—a Divine Saviour, Who, demanding no price from those who indeed had nothing to pay, proclaimed, in virtue of His own vicarious merit, "liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that were bound," allowed as many as would—all if they liked—to return to paradise and heaven, and further enriched such as accordingly set their faces toward Zion, and enquired the way thither, with the gift of His Holy Spirit. Promised in the Old Testament, present in the New, portrayed in prophecy, typified by Cyrus, and celebrated in history, is He Who is called Jesus because He saves His people from their sins.

The cup of the emancipated Jews overflowed with astonishment and delight. Most of them born in captivity, they could hardly believe that they were tied to Babylon no longer,—that, instead of having to pay for their release, they were laden with presents, that they were going to the land of the temple and the homes and sepulchres of their fathers, that Jehovah had so mercifully interposed. "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream." Yet it was a blessed reality. We could

scarcely restrain ourselves. We clapped our hands, danced, and shouted for gladness. "Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing" (Ezra vi. 16, 22; Neh. xii. 43; Job viii. 21; Psalm xiv. 7; Jer. xxxiii. 11). Such is the convert's joy. Whether in the body, or out of it, he can hardly tell. Earth is now like heaven to him, though not his heaven. He is made free. He has heard the proclamation of glad tidings, taken Jesus Christ at His word, turned his back upon his long captivity, and, "filled with the Spirit," is on his journey home. When the Lord pardoned our sins, shed abroad His love in our hearts, and put us into the way to heaven, "we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing."

The Gentiles were so struck with the display of God's mercy and power on behalf of His people, that the freed Jews could not but notice their looks of amazement, and overhear their remarks to one another. "Then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them." What a God is their Jehovah! In a moment He has changed their position and prospects! Well may they sing His praises. So the happiness of the saved sinner is manifest. Even ungodly persons perceive that "he is a new creature," that "old things are passed away" in him, that "all things are become new." Yesterday he hung down his head, and looked dead among the living. To-day he is not like the same person. It is as if he had been released from some thraldom. So he has,—from "the gall of bitterness, and the bond of iniquity." He has found what makes him happy. His heart is glad, and therefore his face is beaming, his voice cheerful, and his society agreeable; and he begins to thrive in the world. The Lord hath done great things for him (Isa. xlv. 14).

Did the Jews object to the remarks of the wondering Gentiles? Did they refuse to acknowledge their obligations to Jehovah? They burst into the laughing response, "The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad;" and in this psalm and elsewhere they recorded their testimony for succeeding generations. "Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem" (Ezra vii. 27). The prediction of Isaiah came to pass:—"Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the Lord hath comforted His people, He hath redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord hath made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God" (Isa. lii. 9, 10). The word of the Lord by Jeremiah was fulfilled:—"Again there shall be heard in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, that are desolate, without man, and without inhabitant, and without beast, the voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, Praise the Lord of hosts: for the Lord is good; for His mercy endureth for ever: and of them that shall bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord. For I will cause to return the captivity of the land, as at the first, saith the Lord" (Jer. xxxiii. 10, 11). So the joy of the converted sinner is confessed. Modesty may check him, and in some circumstances seal his lips; but his manner is ever that of a willing witness for the Lord. He is not disinclined to speak of the love of his Heavenly Father, and there are times and places in which, the more forcibly for his timidity and lowliness, his voice is heard mingling in the acknowledgment, "The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad." However ashamed of himself, he is

disposed to say, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. i. 16). "He that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is His name" (Luke i. 49). "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all His people" (Psalm cxvi. 12-14).

"Come, ye that love the Lord,
And let your joys be known;
Join in a song with sweet accord,
While ye surround His throne.

Let those refuse to sing
Who never knew our God;
But servants of the Heavenly King
May speak their joys abroad."

In the present world, grief is never far from gladness. The second part of the psalm testifies that the boundaries of Babylon are not the limits of distress. The Jews who availed themselves of the clemency of Cyrus, though rich with presents, yet were laden with sorrows. Their bodies were burdens to them. It was a long, weary, and anxious march to Zion. Any day or night they might meet with armed bands of heartless robbers. When they gained Judea, they found the country desolate, Jerusalem in ruins, and the Temple destroyed. What wealth and labour they must devote, and what patience they must exercise, before they could raise themselves dwellings, rebuild the Lord's house, and restore the walls of the city! The Samaritans threatening and annoying them, they had to keep weapons of war among their implements of masonry. How were they to plough the ground, sow the seed, watch the crop, and reap

the harvest? The adjacent tracts of land, parched, wild, and tangled, were infested with roaming herdsmen who respected neither rights nor landmarks. The Hebrew husbandman stole forth into the field with trembling, buried the grain with hurrying fear, and hoped his enemies might not gather the produce. His lot was to "sow in tears." The convert's case is similar. Plucking the rose, he presses the thorn. Escaping from sin, he does not find himself exempt from suffering. Tears blend with his abounding, evident, and acknowledged joys (Ezra iii. 12; Jer. xxx. 15).

The royal preacher said to himself, "As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise?" While in the flesh, the man who, fearing God, is wiser than Solomon sometimes was, cannot wholly rid himself of "the ills that flesh is heir to." The Christian meets with hindrances and disappointments as well as the man of the world. He eats bread by the sweat of his brow. His friends forsake him, are parted from him by distance, or are engulphed in the grave. The sweet flower he bore in his bosom is snatched into heaven. The desire of his eyes is taken away with a stroke. Pains rack his nerves, and he feels on himself the chilling hand of death. "One event happeneth to them all" (Eccles. ii. 14, 15).

If captivity has its peculiar bitterness, so has freedom its own troubles. There are sorrows of which the true Israelite would never have known much, if he had not turned his face towards his fatherland. A way of pleasantness, still it is a perilous journey. Egyptians and Persians, after sending God's children away with gifts, pursue them with curses and weapons. The Babylonians, who say, "The Lord hath done great things for them," nevertheless persecute those for whom the deliverance is wrought, because they acted upon the King's proclamation, obeyed the Gospel

of Christ, and abandoned sin and the world. It is found to be hard work building the city and temple of God, and dangerous living and toiling, in the neighbourhood of bitterly-hostile powers. When the pious labourer goes forth to the field, his spiritual enemies lie in wait to molest, spoil, sow tares, cut down, destroy. He asks, with sighs and tears, "Who is sufficient for these things?"

Caleb's daughter said to him, "Give me a blessing; for thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water" (Josh. xv. 19; Gen. xx. 1). Lacking wells and fountains, the country south of Jerusalem towards the desert depends on periodical rains. Till they break on the mountains in sight, the channels are dry, the land is athirst, the south wind is a breath of fire, the traveller faints, the flocks almost perish, the people plough and sow in mixed despair and hope. "Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain" (James v. 7; Job vi. 17-20). The righteous man, depending on the supplies of Divine grace, like the parched and panting dweller in the plain bereft of showers, has sometimes to exclaim, "Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south." As our famished fellow-subjects in India hunger and thirst for the full and rapid flow of British beneficence, he craves the Almighty's blessing. With his Master, though in a lower sense, he asks, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" He is like the Israelites in the desert, without food or drink till the Lord sent them manna from heaven and water from the rock.

The case of the returned child of the captivity is the more painful because few, after all, have made their way to Zion. Many who ought to have been walking or working at his side, including friends for whose salvation he especially

longs, chose to remain behind, and to make the best they could of the pagan land to which their fathers had been carried captive. We who came home were but as a thin streamlet in the bottom of a broad river-bed: let our brethren now follow us in the same channel like a torrent rolling from the hills. "Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south."

The grief of the Israelite is not momentary. The sower "goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed." They who would feed Jerusalem "go and go" with a continual sameness of careful movement. They step along the extending furrows, on and on; their hand is in the bag of corn, and out of it, in and out; they cast the sacred handfuls into the ground, one after another, and they sigh and wish and pray for the cloud and rain. When the hot reaping-time comes, the yield is insufficient. Again and again they pursue the same mournful and toilsome course; but they realize no permanent rest, "no discharge in this war," no garnered and exhaustless plenty, till their weary bodies, like grains of corn, are committed to the opened earth.

Is it indeed all gloom, no gladness? Is there nothing to relieve the case? Are there no smiles amidst the tears, like sun-bursts between April showers? The thought revives, "What hath God wrought!" It grows into the consideration, What will He not do? Can He cease to be gracious? "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance." Tears sparkle into joy. As laughter preceded, so it follows, weeping. Thankfulness transmutes sorrow, and intensifies pleasure. In the midst of troubles, bearing in mind delights, the Israelite praises God. Never forgetting that all things are divinely ordered, and that goodness and mercy have attended

him, never forgetting his deliverance from Babylon, safe progress to Zion, and subsequent protection in the sacred city, always remembering the happy day when he gave his heart to God, and God gave him His Holy Spirit, he repeats the familiar melody, fresh from the soul as at the first, "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream."

The thankful pray; for they have proved the use of prayer. As prayer found cause for praise, gratitude sees reason for renewed supplication. "The Lord turned Himself to the turning of Zion." God returns to His people when they return to Him (Deut. iv. 30, 31; xxx. 1-3, 9, 10; Neh. i. 9; Job xlii. 10; Psalm cxlv. 18, 19; Isa. x. 21, 22; lv. 7; lix. 20; Jer. xxxi. 8, 9; James iv. 8). He liberated the exiles when they repented and offered supplication. If they have reached Mount Zion, there is still need for them to pray. Jehovah's gracious hand has so lifted them a degree higher on the footsteps of His throne, that they may be nearer His inclined ear with their petitions. Let them say to Him, in the language of humble dependence, "Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south." Thou art to the soul like rain and fountains to the fields. Drought disappears before Thy breath; and the touch of Thy merciful feet clothes earth with beauty and plenty. And, from their past experience, from the constancy with which God has kept His word, from His demonstrated and eternal unchangeableness, they expect that for which they pray. Faith pleads the promises of Him Who cannot lie (Gen. viii. 22; Psalm lxxxv.). "Thou are the same Lord, Whose property is always to have mercy." Thy sure mercy we look for. A praying and praising heart is ready for showers of blessing. "Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the Lord will do great things" (Joel ii. 21).

Slaves, when set free, have sometimes thought themselves emancipated from the necessity of toil. It has taken a generation or two for the servile race to rise from their degradation of spirit to a perception of the dignity and blessedness of willing labour. The captives of Israel had not sunk so low, but were many of them fit for liberty. The returned Jews did more than sing psalms and say prayers. There was work for all, and all set to work. He who does not exert himself ought to be ashamed to sing and afraid to pray. Obedience is a sign of thankfulness and love. "Fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things He hath done for you" (1 Sam. xii. 24). Repair to the field, and scatter the seed, singing as you go, and praying while you labour. Say not, it is of no use. It is idleness that never reaps. Work in the face of alarms. Sow, although in tears. In weeping, yet go along, bearing the precious seed. Get all ready for the desired streams. Be prepared for the expected supplies. Do your duty, whatever may happen, sure that whatever happens will be for the best. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand" (Eccles. xi. 6).

The convert's praises are accepted, his prayers are heard, his labour is not lost. The streams in the south return. "Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, whereby Thou didst confirm Thine inheritance, when it was weary" (Psalm lxviii. 9). The seed springs up, the crop is secure, the harvest is gathered. "Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh" (Luke vi. 21; Matt. v. 4; Isa. xxv. 8). "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." If tears damp joy, joy counteracts and consumes tears. If the grief is continual, so is the gladness. There is the recurring season when load after load is carried from the field with

songs. They who go and go in weeping, bearing precious seed, come along in joy, bringing their sheaves with them. Weal triumphs over woe. The grief is only continual, not eternal. The joy is everlasting (Isa. xxxv. 10). To run from ill, run on, not back. It is pleasant to hear the pilgrim say, Since I set out for heaven, I have had no desire to go back. He finds the new life better than the old, and is sure that it will be yet more happy. He knows what sadness there was, and can guess what woe there would be, in Babylon. Some who failed before, yet try again to make themselves joyful by its mocking rivers; and again they fail (Psalm cxxxvii. 1, 2). "The pleasures of sin," whatever they are, and wherever, are only "for a season." Free, in your own country, at home, under God's special care, if in any respect you have a dark present, you have a wholly bright future. If there is gloom on earth, there is glory on high. Faith mounts the frowning cloud, looks down on its bright side, and rides in a chariot of fire. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. vi. 7-9; 2 Cor. iv. 16-18; Heb. iv. 9). Angels will help the patient believer

> "To bind his full-ear'd sheaves, and bring
> The joyful harvest home."

To us whose sires were captive led
From Zion, when it first was said
The Lord had turn'd the stream,
We wondered if we clearly heard
The glad and unexpected word,
And were like them that dream.

Each questioned if the news were true;
Each told his neighbour all he knew:
'Twas strange to be set free!
Then laughter did our voices fill,
And echoed every startled hill
Our songs of liberty.

Great things for them the Lord hath wrought,
The wondering Gentiles said and thought;
The tidings flew abroad.
He took the flerceness from the flame,
And made the hungry lions tame,
Shadrach's and Daniel's God.

He wrote the warning on the wall
Portentous of Belshazzar's fall,
Which only one could read.
A hundred years His whispered word
The exiles have of Cyrus heard,
By whom they have been freed.

The Lord for them hath done great things,
Made kings their slaves, and made them kings:
They well may praise their God
His benefits to us are great;
And thus, with liberty elate,
His name we mean to laud.

But why do few, like silver thread
Along a river's vacant bed,
Back to their country go?
As channels in the southern plain,
Replenished by the mountain-rain,
Lord, let them homeward flow.

In Babylon they choose to stay,
Appalled by perils of the way,
And threatening poverty;

But, if at home we fight with fears,
And till the harassed land with tears,
We are where we would be.

In tears who sow, in joy shall reap.
Though forth we go to watch and weep,
Bearing the precious seed,
Coming again with harvest song,
Bringing our golden sheaves along,
We shall be free indeed.

The world may flaunt in fading charms,
And harp on piety's alarms,
While owning God can bless;
But we will ne'er renew our chains,
And lose our hope of heavenly gains,
For Babylon's caress.

VIII.

THE SOURCE OF GOOD.

"1. Except the LORD build the house,
They labour in vain that build it:
Except the LORD keep the city,
The watchman waketh but in vain.
2. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late,
To eat the bread of sorrows:
For so He giveth His beloved sleep.
3. Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD:
And the fruit of the womb is His reward.
4. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man;
So are children of the youth.
5. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them:
They shall not be ashamed,
But they shall speak with the enemies in the gate."

—PSALM CXXVII.

VARIOUS considerations taken together require the opinion that this middle Song of Degrees was composed, as the marginal rendering of the title says, by Solomon. It suits the time of peaceful house-building and civil settlement and progress during which he reigned. It uses a word answering to his name, Jedidiah, meaning beloved of the Lord, and seems in connection with it to refer to the promise of "a wise and an understanding heart," unasked "riches and honour," and, if he should prove faithful, length of days, made to him "in a dream by night." So He giveth His beloved sleep," or "to His beloved in sleep" (2 Sam. xii. 25; 1 Kings iii. 5-15). It appears to suggest that the claims

of the Temple to the efforts of builders are superior to those of any other intended erection. And it agrees with Solomon's sententious style in his Proverbs, one of which exactly expresses its substance and teaching: "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it," or, "and labour adds nothing thereto" (Prov. x. 22).

Men are not to take to themselves the credit of their achievements and possessions. The ambitious may not boast of their own wisdom and might; and the prosperous may not suppose they are self-sufficient. It is God Who gives skill to plan, and ability to execute. In a moment He could deprive our arms of strength, or our minds of reason. It is useless to struggle against His decrees. "Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places; thus saith the Lord of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the Lord hath indignation for ever" (Mal. i. 4). We must remember our continual dependence upon Him, beseech Him to guide and help us in our undertakings, and praise Him for all we have and do. He is the Source of blessing. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights" (James i. 17). "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it."

When the work completed by Solomon and his subjects had to be done over again by Zerubbabel and the returned Israelites as best it might be with the blessing of the Lord, it was natural for the psalm to come into popular use as aforetime; and it was unquestionably proper to include in the collection made at last of songs for the pilgrimages a hymn so familiar to generation after generation, and so appropriate for citizens who attributed their domestic happi-

ness and civil prosperity to the goodness of God, and left their families and property to His care when, obeying His commandment, and relying on His promised protection, they went up to worship Him on the holy hill of Zion. How fitting this pilgrim-song of thankful acknowledgment, cheerful toil, and loving duty, as the central one of the fifteen! How suitable on the middle step of the ascent to heaven's temple! We have come so far, and have so far to go, it seems to say; and He Who has helped us hitherto will help us to the end. Whatever our successes, we have no reason to be proud; and whatever our failures and hardships, we will neither be idle nor discouraged. We will praise and trust the Fountain and Giver of good, by Whom we are not forgotten.

"Forth in Thy name, O Lord, I go,
My daily labour to pursue,
Thee, only Thee, resolved to know,
In all I think, or speak, or do.

"The task Thy wisdom hath assigned,
Oh, let me cheerfully fulfil;
In all my works Thy presence find,
And prove Thy acceptable will!

"Thee may I set at my right hand,
Whose eyes my inmost substance see;
And labour on at Thy command,
And offer all my works to Thee."

They would greatly abuse and pervert the psalm, who should make it an excuse for improvidence and sloth. In the expression "bread of sorrows," there is an allusion to the law of labour under which we have our being and our hope. He Who made Paradise for Adam could do, and does, all for us; but as the father of our race was required

to dress and keep the garden before driven thence, and to eat bread in the sweat of his face, after his fall, so we are commanded to dig our living out of the earth. They take the curse only, and refuse what would make it a blessing, who endeavour to subsist upon the "bread of idleness." A half-naked Indian, bounding with bow and arrows over hill and plain in pursuit of bird or beast for food, is more a man than the lounger in rags or purple who, amongst toiling neighbours, does nothing but sleep or look on, eat and drink, and yawn for novel pleasures. Such a laggard, if born in the forest, would never have turned any portion of it into a garden, or provided himself with a more convenient dwelling than the hollow of the rock or tree. Whoever in the midst of civilization and religion, forgetting God and imposing upon men, neglects to work, is the real savage or heathen. The Master and Feeder demands service for support. As assumed in the song, we are to earn our bread by pains. "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" (Gen. iii. 17-19). Otherwise thou deservest none, and but fillest thy mouth with dust. Only, says the Lord by the poet, boast not of thy sweat and sorrow, foresight and work. Glory in God, Who lends thee strength and wisdom, covers the tilled field with fruit, and crowns the finished house with blessing. Do not think of being a sharer in credit with Him, of giving Him half the honour and claiming half for thyself; but let Him have all the glory. There is no good that does not come from Him, and no praise that is not due to Him. He rewards thee with food and health, pleasure and profit. He is the Founder, Defender, and Preserver of the State, the Church, and the family.

When Solomon composed this song, the interests of his

kingdom, as to consolidation and progress, could not be absent from his thoughts. Consciously unequal to the great work bequeathed to him, the anxiety of the day trenching upon the night, he had prayed like "a little child" to the Lord to give him "an understanding heart" (1 Kings iii. 7-9). With that humble petition agrees this didactic ode, written in a state of tranquillity which was a fulfilment of the Lord's promise to David: "Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest: and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon,"—that is, "peaceable,"—"and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days" (1 Chron. xxii. 9). He Who scattered the builders of Babel, and took the kingdom from Saul, and turned the counsel of Ahitophel to foolishness, confounds and frustrates the wisest and strongest who attempt to establish and aggrandise themselves as if neither responsible to the Most High nor in any need of His succour. The walls built by kings, statesmen, and generals, without His sanction and blessing, bulge and break, crumble and fall; the watchers they station fly from their own shadow; the schemes for the nourishment of their country which they spend day and night in maturing are labour lost; and even their youths faint and are weary, and their young men utterly fall (Isa. xl. 30). France but exhausted her quiver for humiliation and suffering in her last atheistic war, and has since been waiting for sons to grow up who will not shame her in the gate. They only rule prosperously who organise, watch, legislate, and educate in the name and service of God. "The Lord of hosts shall defend them. The Lord their God shall save them as the flock of His people. For how great is His goodness, and how great is His beauty! Corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids" (Zech. ix. 9-17).

It is not less likely that Solomon wrote in godly jealousy, lest the people should be more eager to build dwellings for themselves than the temple for Jehovah. He was of the same mind as his father, to "find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob" (Psalm cxxxii. 3-5). The expostulation of Haggai in the day of Zerubbabel was anticipated: "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?" (Hag. i. 4.) But the cordial help of the people was not all that Solomon desired. Nor was his chief reliance upon the friendly cooperation of Hiram king of Tyre. The prince of temple-builders acknowledged his dependence upon the blessing of the Lord. It is possible for the draughtsmen, overlookers, and workers whom the Supreme Architect employs to forget that they are accountable creatures. Ecclesiastical organizers and agents scheme and execute to little purpose, if they do not trust and serve the Head and Spirit of the Church. Divines, evangelists, and pastors, wardens, deacons, and stewards, must follow His instructions and inspirations, or their beautiful walls may fall down as fast as they put them up" (1 Cor. iii. 9-13; 2 Cor. vi. 1).

In the midst of hewn stones and shaped timbers, and still more when admiring a splendid pile of sacred architecture designed or completed, and fancying or witnessing well-ordered services on the smooth floor, it may sometimes be difficult to remember that the true house of God is spiritual. His temple existed before Solomon's, and survived its overthrow; and oppressors have not banished or destroyed the Church by closing or levelling churches. "When King Sapor II. had shut up all the churches throughout Persia, the Christians next converted every house into a church, and performed their religious rites in every place; nay, they even supposed themselves to be temples" (Neander; 1 Cor. iii. 16;

Eph. ii. 20-22). The real Church has lived on by the might of the Lord through antichristian tyrannies and corruptions in every country; and it will never perish. Statesmen may leave it to take care of itself; and God will not fail to cherish it, even though the sovereign of the day be, not a Solomon, but a Nero. He would bless the State by means of the Church, and the Church by means of the State, but will reject empires and republics in rapid succession rather than not uphold His Israel.

If the watchmen in the streets and upon the walls of the New Jerusalem (Isaiah lxii. 6), whether they guard against unfaithfulness within, closely observing one another, and seeing that subordinates honestly and fully do their duty, or give warning of threatened depredations from without, preventing the approaches and encroachments of worldliness, immorality, infidelity, and superstition,—if the Church's rulers and officers are not serving under the unslumbering Keeper of Israel, and in the possession of His blessing, their wakefulness and watchwords, creeds and apologies, examinations and decisions, expositions and exhortations, are "but in vain." The organization of Zion may be perfect, and its territories rich, and well looked over by many forts of councils, conferences, and convocations; its managers and administrators may be wise, and its servants in the field laborious; but if the Lord withhold His dew and rain and sunshine, it starves in the midst of endowments, its revenues dry up, its farms yield no maintenance, it shrinks to a skeleton of doctrines, traditions and forms, and bears upon it all the marks of hastening perdition.

A prosperous Church is like a family with merry children, or an army with promising recruits. Happy is a religious denomination when the interests of its young people are well cared for, when there are fresh converts in its congrega-

tions, when suitable candidates for its ministry are numerous, when faithful professors are surrounded by ardent disciples in its colleges, when its working ministers have troops of cheerful assistants, when a Paul therein can point to his zealous son Timothy, and a Peter has his diligent John Mark at his service! With its quiver so filled, no injustice can trample upon a Christian society, and no proud adversary can shame it in the gate. It rejoices and flourishes by the blessing of the Lord.

The song is even more for the family than the government or temple. Anxious for the stability of the nation and the completion and glory of the sanctuary, and concerned lest the selfishness of the people should prevent their giving enough of heart, head, and hand, to the interests of the commonwealth, yet Solomon could not but contemplate with satisfaction the eagerness and skill with which they were improving their opportunity to erect themselves houses. He only feared that they might go too fast for their welfare; and his chief aim seems to have been to keep them in mind of the Source of domestic blessings. Every one must leave to the Supreme Designer the definition of his fortune, apply himself to such work as Providence assigns him, and from first to last build in God's service and for His glory. Whatever dimensions or shape the house may assume, it must be dedicated to Him from the beginning; and in the laying of the foundation He must be invited to condescend to make it His dwelling. Then the top stone shall be brought on with rejoicing, and the whole edifice be made bright by the smile of Jehovah. If a palace, He will cause it to be truly such: if a hut, He will make it a palace. But when he who would pile stone upon stone forgets the Almighty, a small tower of Babel is being attempted, which will be the birthplace of confusion, dissension, and want. "He buildeth his

house as a moth, and as a booth that the keeper maketh" (Job xxvii. 18).

Built, the house needs to be protected. Solomon's solicitude for the continued safety of his subjects is pleasant to notice. He will do his best for their security, but owns that his utmost vigilance is useless without the Lord's blessing. He himself requires a defender; and the king's Guard is God. Under God and the king, as the country is the bulwark of the capital, the city is the defence of the dwelling. As Jehovah's watchman for the private citizen, the monarch employs officers night and day to go up and down the street in which he lives, and round about his habitation. Those king's-men may be trained, armed, and active; but in vain they are on the alert, and hour after hour repeat their assuring cry, without the support of a Keeper nearer than they, greater than Solomon, protecting earth and heaven, a better Guard even than daylight. "My soul waiteth for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning" (Psalm cxxx. 6). Let Him come, and all will be well. If I have Him for my Shield, bolts and bars are not useless, and the king, soldier and constable do not wake in vain. "Note, that whereas it is said, 'Except the Lord build,' yet it is not said, 'Except the Lord wake,' (since He that keepeth Israel neither slumbereth nor sleepeth,) but 'Except the Lord keep'" (*quotation by Littledale*).

While others thus watch with the citizen for his safety, he has to contribute to the support of the government by which he and his neighbours are protected, and to maintain his family. Bread is to be procured by him, in many cases indeed with "sorrows." He must stand that he may recline, and labour to get rest. Rising is opposed here to sitting (Deut. vi. 7; Psalm cxxxix. 2; Isa. v. 11; Lam. iii. 63). True, there are sedentary employments pursued often

to a late hour; but the meaning is sitting after, not at, work. The idea conveyed in the song is not "to sit up late," but, implied in those words, to be late in sitting down. "It is but lost labour that ye haste to rise up early, and so late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness" (Prayer-Book version). Without the blessing of the Lord, a long day's work is vanity. As with the founding and fending, He has to do with the feeding. Man digs the earth, and gathers the manna; but, "he knoweth not how" (Mark iv. 27), God makes the seed grow, and ripens the corn.

The Psalmist tells us to whom and whence comes "tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep." As God builds the house, keeps the city, and finds daily bread for those who work to please Him, and trust Him for His blessing, "so He giveth His beloved sleep." It is not to be had without His leave, and He is most sure to grant it to the honest toilers whom He approves. "The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep;" if he eat much when he ought to eat little, or if his plenty be a load upon his conscience, or if his godless puzzle day and night be how to retain what he possesses (Eccles. v. 12). He sleeps well enough when he makes himself a pious worker; and the poor man loses his sleep when the secret of his labouring is that he "will be rich." Sleep is God's gift, neither to be refused for dreams of gain, nor abused in shameful idleness. It is His blessing for the healthy body and the peaceful mind. It is given to those who, loved by God and loving Him, labour for everything, and are "careful for nothing." Whether men work with hand or head, pickaxe or pen, whether a fortune welcomes them at their birth or speeds them at their death, whether they are rich or poor, accomplished or illiterate, they must not seek to sleep on what they

own or get or purpose, but humbly and wholly in the care of God. Then their pillow will not be hard, and repose will not be absent. In the midst of danger, thinking of his sole Guardian, David said, "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for Thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety" (Psalm iv. 8). The flock of the Lord run to this promise in adverse circumstances: "They shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods" (Ezek. xxxiv. 25).

"Oh that I could, with favoured John,
Recline my weary head upon
The great Redeemer's breast!
From care, and sin, and sorrow free,
Give me, O Lord, to find in Thee
My everlasting rest."

He gives to His beloved in sleep. He does not let His saints labour in vain, but, far from that, bestows good upon them beyond their efforts and expectations, because they are His beloved. So much prosperity comes, that it is as if they slept, and God did all the work. He blesses, not for, though not without their care and toil, but in His grace. Let Him determine upon it, and His blessing is theirs beyond their endeavours, and even, they may think, in spite of their sleeping. They make sure of it by being His beloved.

By building and watching, toiling and storing, a home is provided for children. "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is His reward." He must be praised, while they are welcomed and treasured. They are His gifts and blessings (Gen. xxx. 2, 18; xxxiii. 5; xlviii. 9; Deut. vii. 13; Prov. xix. 14). When Issachar was born, Leah gave him that name, signifying price, or reward, because, said she, "God hath given me my hire." Sons and daughters, in their gratitude, obedience, and help, are God's recompense of parental foresight, self-denial, and

care. "As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth." The picture is not that of an old man who is the helpless father of helpless babes, but of one who built his house in life's forenoon, and now in his age is surrounded by grown-up sons, whose wisdom he is, and who are his strength. He is a king or patriarch, liable to be attacked by force or fraud; and they are his ministers of state and army of defence. "Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them." This figure is still used in Eastern sayings. "When a son is born into a family, a bow and arrow are hung before the gate" (Chinese proverb). That is, the house is stronger and more hopeful than it was. If the happy parents live to hoary years, they will not be alone and helpless. They will be cherished and supported by those whom now they nurse. Their mature offspring will be at hand to take their part in any emergency, and will be their prosperity in their declining days. "They shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate,"—the place of business, judgment, and strife, able to deal with the cunning merchant, confound the false accuser, and repel the assailing foe (Josh. xx. 4; Judges v. 8; Ruth iv. 1; Job v. 4; Psalm lxix. 12; Lam. v. 14; Zech. viii. 16). The brave son does not allow his father to be slandered or wronged. The faithful daughter is her mother's commendation and joy. They are only young, say proud parents of their loving and dutiful children,—always children to their view,—but we can trust almost everything in their hands. Rebekah fetches water from the well. Esau brings venison from the field. David tends the sheep on the hill-side. The girl keeps house. The boy manages the business. Our son is away attending to the unloading and reloading of the ship. Who has not heard with pleasure and respect men and women thus making boast of their bright arms

of security and triumph? Their gay quivers and polished arrows, and their smiling faces, command deference and sympathy.

While God is swift to turn curses into blessings, men too often make haste to force blessings into curses. The song is of righteous parents training their children for the Lord. Arrows likely to hit the mark are those "in the hand of a mighty man," able to fit them on the string and determine their strong course. Parents must not trifle with their children, like idiots playing with sharp tools; but, as the bowman straightens and polishes his arrow, gives it a solid point, and wings it with proper feathers, they must educate their sons and daughters in the name and with the help of the "Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Heb. xi. 6; Job xxvii. 13-18).

The reward can change itself into a punishment. The unformed shaft can mistake itself for the finished weapon. The incompetent child can set up for the mighty man. The arrow can pierce the heart of its owner. Not of children like Absalom does the psalm speak, but of such as delight to prove themselves blessings, and find pleasure in making their parents glad.

The pearl of great price for all, in whatever relation, is in Jesus Christ. He is the blessing of the Lord, bringing all blessings with Him. While we lift up our hands in His name, and crave the good we want, let us avoid any temper or indulgence, word or act, that would cause it to be denied. And to God the Father, Who "setteth the solitary in a house" (Psalm lxviii. 6, margin), and is "the God of all the families of Israel" (Jer. xxxi. 1); to God the Son, Redeemer of the world, in Whom "all the families of the earth" are "blessed" (Gen. xii. 3; xxviii. 14); and to God the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, Who descends as a Dove, and rests

upon every religious home, be ascribed all praise and glory, world without end. Amen.

The aptness of our good designs,
 The harvests that our toil reward,
The gladness that around us shines,
 Are all the blessings of the Lord.

Except by Him the house be built,
 The daring enterprise is vain
As theirs who in presuming guilt
 Began the tower on Shinar's plain.

If He His guardian care withdraw,
 In vain their rounds the sentries beat;
No shelter is there in the law,
 No refuge in the judgment-seat.

He only Who the manna spread
 Can make the earth its secret yield,
And turn the broken ground to bread,
 The wild into a fruitful field.

'Tis not from every hard-wrought mine
 The upward stream of fortune flows:
Who early rise and late recline
 May lose both labour and repose.

Who live not in the grace of God
 May sweat to eat and wake to pray,
Yet vainly spread their hands abroad,
 And throw their flound'ring lives away.

He gives His lov'd one sleep, bestows
 In vision what was craved with tears,
And more, in dream prophetic shows,
 Not wit alone, but wealth and years.

Why rear the wall, and hang the door,
And daily work from morn till night?
Lo! children crown the gather'd store,
The richest fruit when free from blight.

Sons of a timely-wedded pair
Are arrows in a hero's hand;
And happy he whose shoulders bear
A quiver-full at his command.

Before his offspring come of age,
He is not impotently old;
And while his wisdom makes them sage,
Their vigour keeps him strong and bold.

His champions in the gate, they gain
His righteous cause against his foes.
With every house will God remain
Where faith commands and virtue grows.

IX.

A HAPPY HOME.

"1. Blessed s every one that feareth the LORD;
That walketh in His ways.
2. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands:
Happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee.
3. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house:
Thy children like olive plants round about thy table.
4. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed
That feareth the LORD.
5. The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion:
And thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life.
6. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children,
And peace upon Israel."

—PSALM CXXVIII.

To not a few there is a familiar sound in these words. Where have we heard them before? They have been solemnly spoken to us in the sanctuary, a short sermon from God, telling us how happy we should be if we would but fear the Lord. His minister read them at that critical stage of our pilgrimage when we left father and mother for company dear to us as theirs, but not making them less dear. This psalm was the first lesson of Scripture given us after the solemn declaration that we were joined together by God, and must thenceforth journey side by side till death should snatch one of us away. Whether or not composed originally for a marriage-song, it must have been often chanted by the Jews as such; and it has long been, and is universally used in Christian weddings. In the Eastern Church it is sung at

the beginning of the matrimonial office: in the Western it commences the second part, after the sacred covenant has been made. Have we feared the Lord, as He commanded us? Has our married lot been so happy as, on that condition, He promised it should be? Perhaps we have too much slighted this song of our pilgrimage. May it produce a better and more lasting effect on the minds of those "that intend to take the holy estate of matrimony upon" them. It will do them good to ponder it seriously beforehand, and is most suitable to be included in the hymn-book of God's pilgrims, and frequently repeated by them in their progress to the Heavenly Zion.

The preceding psalm set forth the vanity of building without the Lord's blessing. Now we are introduced to a home rich in His abiding favour. A prosperous householder and his cheerful family are discovered. The opening verse of each half of the song describes the master, whom the other members of the household follow and resemble. He "feareth the Lord." It is obvious that the fear meant is not that of trembling guilt. Nor is it natural dread, such as the Almighty produces when He shakes the thunderbolt, makes the earth quake, and lets the tempest loose. Nor is it the hypocrite's religion,—a pretended fear. Nor is it mere orthodoxy, the body without life, a correct creed without corresponding tempers and deeds. Nor is it indolent stillness before God. As the second clause explains, it is the characteristic of a man who labours. "Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord; that walketh in His ways." Filial fear is intended, the fear of love and likemindedness, finding its meat in doing the will of the Lord, all Whose paths are "mercy and truth" (Psalm xxv. 10). "He only truly fears God, who is afraid to displease Him by forsaking the paths of His commandments" (*Comber*).

Such fear is the atmosphere of the house described by the Psalmist. They best worship and serve one another who, in the higher sense, worship and serve the Lord. The good man has God dwelling with him, and religion is the spirit of his domestic rule and life. The family of which he is the head is a true church. The children honour their parents, and the wife reverences her husband, because all of them fear and love their Heavenly Father

The householder who fears the Lord is happy in his daily work. If you would look upon blessedness, you keep away from the man who does not fear the Lord. You do not go to the cell of the drunkard, where a pale wife totters with weakness, and ragged children cry for bread. You do not visit the speculator's den of cares, or the swindler's whitewashed hell. You do not stand in the road to watch the guilty usurper and his base followers, a masked procession of tormented souls. You know, and the wretches, poor or rich, are themselves aware, that their substance is not their own. They are dressed in stolen garments, spend the money of other people, and eat their neighbours' food. For a scene of happiness, you turn to the house of the honest man who prays to God in the morning, honours Him in his transactions through the day, and gives Him thanks at night. Whether the master of a clean cottage, where the good wife's hands are white with flour or suds, and the rosy children play in the open door, or the lord of the mansion, in which silks rustle, servants are busy, and smooth-haired boys and girls prettily stammer lessons in unknown tongues, he is manifestly rich and free. Because his work is done, not in the sinful self-reliance censured in the preceding psalm, but under a sense of humble dependence upon the Lord, it is labour blest, not lost. "For thou shalt eat," says the song to the God-fearing man, not bread belonging

to another, neither the undeserved bread of idleness, nor the gritty bread of dishonesty, nor the dry bread of avarice, but the sweet and wholesome food obtained from earth and Heaven by "the labour of thine hands." The promise is the counterpart of a threatening with which the Jewish memory was charged. It had been said for all ages to the man who would not fear the Lord and walk in His ways, "The fruit of thy land, and all thy labours, shall a nation which thou knowest not eat up. Thou shalt carry much seed out into the field, and shall gather but little in; for the locust shall consume it. Thou shalt plant vineyards, and dress them, but shalt neither drink of the wine, nor gather the grapes; for the worms shall eat them. Thou shalt have olive trees throughout all thy coasts, but thou shalt not anoint thyself with the oil; for thine olive shall cast his fruit" (Deut. xxviii. 33, 38-40; Lev. xxvi. 16). On the contrary, fear God, and keep His commandments, and thou shalt not spend thy strength for nought. "The seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew" (Zech. viii. 12). The blades shall spring up along the furrows in unbroken ranks, no blight shall fall upon the ripening corn, the harvest shall be safely gathered home, and in the midst of thy laughing children "thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands; happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee."

The man who walks in the ways of the Lord is happy in his family. "Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house,"—the inner sides of it, which look upon the court. "Thy wife within thy house shall be as a fruitful vine." There are trailing slatterns, like brambles and nettles, who leave conspicuous in a dwelling what they should conceal, and choke with unsightliness and discomfort

what ought to be kept clear; who cause what would be attractive to offend, render what is repulsive more so, and, themselves the most forbidding objects, drive their toil-worn husbands to the seat of the scornful and the bower of sin. The woman pictured in the song is not to be seen lounging at the door, an idle gossip, with something to say to every passer-by, but attends to her duties in the interior of the dwelling, and, like her husband, fears the Lord (Prov. ix. 13, 14; Amos vi. 10). The clinging vine is a symbol of attachment, grace, and fruitfulness, dressing the props and walls to which its curling tendrils hold, with leaves that shade the verandah and cool the house, and enriching them with clusters of juicy fruit "that maketh glad the heart of man" (Psalm civ. 15). The pious and loving wife, the screen, adornment, and crown of the God-fearing husband who is her support and strength, so spreads the table that, however plain, it is a feast; so pours the water that it turns to wine; so smiles that all the room shines with comfort and pleasure; so speaks that the house is full of charming music; so lives that the master is happy everywhere because most happy when at home.

Among the countless scenes of interest in the warm lands of the East which the Bible brings to view, are groups of persons eating and drinking in the shelter of bright-tinted shrubs and beneath the shadow of fanning trees (Gen. xviii. 4, 5, 8; Esther i. 5). We see here the good man of the house sitting at his meal, while his fond wife waits on him, and his little ones stand, or, like the breeze-stirred branches near him, frolic round his table. The poet, having praised the vine-like mother, passes to the children, comparing them to olive-plants. Oil being as precious as wine, it is as natural and usual to liken prosperous people to the olive as to the vine (Psalm lii. 8; Jer. xi. 16).

As olive-trees, symbolizing peace, contentment, and holiness, are more valuable than wild trees in the field, the offspring of the pious excel those of the wicked. To men who would not fear and serve God it had been said, "Thou shalt beget sons and daughters, but thou shalt not enjoy them: for they shall go into captivity" (Deut. xxviii. 41). Thine, yet they shall belong to others. The olive-plants of the unfaithful shall be plucked from the parent soil, and never yield fruit, but be cast forth into the unsparing fire of the world. They shall go into the bondage of evil passions and habits, and perhaps not be recovered. But, O happy man who walkest in the ways of the Lord, "thy children round about thy table shall be like olive-trees." Vigorous, able to stand alone and separate, bright with the promise of goodly fruit and rivers of oil, they shall exceedingly refresh thy eyes. Rooted to the spot, glad to stay at home, "round about thy table," loving and dutiful, they shall abundantly delight thy heart. In the sight of God they shall be pleasant; for thou wilt not leave them to themselves, but see that they be diligently trained. He who fears the Lord is careful to instruct his family, that they may grow in grace and usefulness, according to the word of David, "Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord" (Psalm xxxiv. 11). And his blooming boys and girls profit by his holy example and wise counsel.

Judging from this and the preceding psalm, Israel, compared with other lands, was, as England is, the country of sweet homes. If our home is less happy than it ought to be, it is either because we are personally deficient in piety, or do not recommend it by consistent pattern and judicious precept to those with whom we dwell. The condition of domestic peace and religious hope, the secret of the perfect home, in England, as in Israel, is the fear of the Lord.

"Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed," not that hoards wealth, or squanders it, not that devotes his life to the pleasures of sin and self, not that is clothed in purple and fine linen, and fares sumptuously every day (Luke xvi. 19), but "that feareth the Lord." A man who has made what is called his fortune, buys a house with surrounding orchards and groves, and spends much of his expiring time in pacing the well-ordered grounds, admiring the foliage, counting the blossoms, and watching the fruit. Rich in the sign of blessedness, yet he may lack what is signified; and then even he is unfortunate and poor. The country, to whose beauty he contributes, is a paradise for all. True, the pretty hedgerows and waving trees and peeping flower-beds do not belong to us. Yet they do: they are the prized property of our eyes and hearts; and, however low, we are on a level, if we choose, with the high. In the enclosed garden and private estate described in the psalm, the peasant, by God's blessing, is as wealthy as the squire. He cannot have the material sign in equal amount, behind painted gates and lofty walls, to call his own; but within his humble wicket he may possess not less of the essential worth and treasure signified. In the fruitful vine inside his cot and the olive plants round about his board, in the partner who fears the Lord and children who love the Saviour, in a table which is also an altar, where grace is said, and the manna of the Word is tasted, and where the flowers of prayer breathe fragrance, he may be rich and happy as a king. Religion makes the meanest home a heaven. "Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord."

So begins the second part of this ancient song of "home, sweet home." The happiness of the pious family is now traced to its Source (Psalm xx. 2; cxxi. 1). "The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion." His blessing, of which the

preceding psalm sang the necessity, prospers thy daily labour, makes thy vine fruitful, and waters thy olive-trees; and it flows from His temple. Private and domestic good is the interest and dividend of thy share in a public and general benefit. The life of religion is not solitary, and its advantages cannot be confined to a family. There is a connection between the home and the sanctuary. Each belongs to the other. The fire on the domestic altar is brought from Zion, and that on the sacred mountain is carried thither from Israel's dwellings. No man can fear the Lord, and walk in His ways, without bending his steps to the house of God, and pacing its hallowed courts. To frequent the place where prayer is wont to be made is not less natural for a righteous man than to go to the scene of his daily labour. He would as soon think of absenting himself from the farm or market as from the temple. He can refrain from neither. "Not slothful in business," he is "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" (Rom. xii. 11). Like the joy with which he returns to his dwelling is the love with which he repairs to the place of worship; and the welcome he receives at home is a type of that which God gives him in the sanctuary. He goes to the holy hill with offerings for the Lord, and does not descend from it empty-handed, but bears back blessings for his family. The Church flourishes more for his prosperity, and he and his household are more happy for the Church's vigour.

Not only is he who fears God blessed through the Church, and made a blessing to it. He contributes to and shares in the peace and prosperity of the State. The psalm is a patriotic as well as domestic hymn. Homes make the nation, as they make the Church. A country is prosperous, as it is pious. What Israelites are, shall Israel be. Israel shall be a godly family, with its happy home in Jerusalem.

There shall be no premature decay in the population. The capital shall present a mingled scene of merry childhood, manly ripeness and green age. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts: There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof" (Zech. viii. 4, 5). The song ends like another which has been considered (cxxv). "And thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem," "and peace upon Israel," and find therein thy own welfare. O happy land, where Home and Church and State are one system of which the common life-blood is religion! No other nation thrives like that in which piety is pure and prosperous. Through one rejoicing citizen or household, God makes many happy; and the good man is blessed in the blessedness he diffuses. It is a circle of blessing, the Lord, the saint, and the neighbour; closet prayer, family worship and temple service; the Home, the Church and the State. Like the cloud falling upon the earth, the river running to the sea, and the ocean rising to the sky, it is a perpetual round of fertility, beauty and thanksgiving, regarded with complacence by the radiant Artificer enthroned in the heavens. All goes on together. It is not the Church blest now, the government next, and then the citizen, but each supporting and supported by the rest, and all depending on God's unfailing blessing. The Christian country is His habitation, His vine is the branching Church, and His olive-plants are God-fearing people.

The profitableness of walking in the ways of the Lord is not the brightness of a transient summer. No winter comes to chill the felicity, and check its circulation. "Thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life." Those days shall not be few. Nothing so surely as holy wisdom

and understanding prolongs life. Departing from evil, fearing God, not with a gloomy dread, but a sweet reverence of wonder, trust, and love, working with success, eating the labour of thy hands, temperate, contented and cheerful, happy in thy going out and coming in, blessed in thy own house, and in the Lord's, free from distracting care, startled by no alarms, depending with conscious safety upon thy Heavenly Father, thou hast everything to minister to health and make thy days long in the tranquil and fertile land which the Lord thy God hath given thee. "Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children." The good fortune shall be thine which was described in the preceding psalm: "Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them."

It is interesting to see some aged statesman toiling for the public good, though he must soon leave all the work to others. A more beautiful and useful sight is a Christian still cheerfully praying and labouring for the Church's and the country's welfare as he draws near the grave. Work on, old pilgrim. Thou mayest not live to enjoy the results of philanthropic movements in which thou art taking part. The longest life closes at last; and prosperous Israel outlives the happy Israelite. Do not therefore fret. Thy reward will follow. The true Israelite survives the outward Israel. The land thou lovest and servest is a type of the better land which thou shalt shortly enter. According to ancient thought, not only the life that now is, but that which is to come, is indicated in the double sentence: "Happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee." The Source of thy blessedness will not dry up, but gush forth more plentifully in the valley of shadows. The Spring of thy joys will more nearly reveal Himself in death. When the Jews shall have been absorbed in the Church of Jesus Christ, when angels shall have lighted on the ruins of the present world, when a new earth and

new heavens shall have long been occupied, thou shalt be in thy consummate happiness. Final, it will yet be always beginning. After ages and ages, more than ages will remain to thee of perfect felicity. Never declining, ever advancing, thy bliss will be eternal. For ever and ever "blessed is every one that feareth the Lord; that walketh in His ways." Religion on earth is the seed in the ground; its mighty growth is in heaven. "Thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be" here, "and it shall be well with thee" hereafter. "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God" (Luke xiv. 15). "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. iv. 8).

It is a precious promise, but, perhaps thou art tempted to say in thy heart, not meant for everyone. Wilt thou answer against the Lord? Hear Him speak in the song. He says, "every one." "Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord." None are excluded but those who will not walk in His ways. Every one may be an obedient servant of God, through Christ. Every one may have joy in time and eternity. According to thy faith and faithfulness, it shall be done unto thee. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccles. xii. 13).

To the Father of lights, from Whom cometh every good and perfect gift, Who sends His people help from the sanctuary, and strengthens them out of Zion, and "with Whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning," be everlasting praise. Amen.

Careful the paths to shun
 By reckless sinners trod,
Happy is every one
 Who fears the Lord his God;

Blessed art thou, whoe'er thou art,
Who wilt not from His ways depart.

No foe shall snatch thy meat;
No blight impair thy lands;
Securely thou shalt eat
The labour of thy hands;
No sudden ills shall thee molest,
Of every crowding good possessed.

At home, as vines array
The trellis-work they hide,
While thou shalt be her stay,
Thy wife shall be thy pride;
Like rooted olives, green and strong,
Thy sons shall round thy table throng.

Thus shall he dwell in peace,
His paradise shall grow,
His wine and oil increase,
His happiness o'erflow,
From truth and grace who does not stray,
But firmly keeps the holy way.

For thee the Lord shall care,
And for the Church in thee;
And thou shalt see and share
The State's prosperity,
Jerusalem in part uphold,
And rest in peaceful Israel's fold.

From sorrow, guilt and fears,
From want and sickness free,
Thou shalt in golden years
Thy children's children see,
Till life's long happiness be past
For brighter joys that ever last.

Whose homes are mansions in
 The Father's house below,
A higher fortune win,
 And to the bowers go,
Made ready by redeeming love
In His eternal house above.

X.

THE AFFLICTIONS OF ISRAEL.

"1. Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth,
May Israel now say:
2. Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth;
Yet they have not prevailed against me.
3. The plowers plowed upon my back:
They made long their furrows.
4. The LORD is righteous:
He hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked.
5. Let them all be confounded and turned back
That hate Zion.
6. Let them be as the grass upon the housetops,
Which withereth afore it groweth up:
7. Wherewith the mower filleth not his hand;
Nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom.
8. Neither do they which go by say,
The blessing of the LORD be upon you:
We bless you in the name of the LORD."

—PSALM CXXIX.

AFTER the spectacle of unmixed and continual happiness presented in the preceding psalm, one is ready to ask if they who fear the Lord are never in trouble. Is affliction a proof that religion is wanting? Do the griefs and joys of men answer to their personal character and destiny? Are they the frowns and smiles that cross the face of the Lord as He looks down upon His children particularly and individually? Is calamity a sign of His direct displeasure? We are taught to distinguish between outward and inward darkness, sickness and distress. God's blessing does not

always come in a smooth current of temporal prosperity, but often in the grace that turns evil to good. His saints describe themselves "as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing" (2 Cor. vi. 9, 10). "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body" (2 Cor. iv. 8-10). The lesson of the present song agrees with David's testimony, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all" (Psalm xxxiv. 19). Another hymn of praise for what is past, and trust for what shall come, it sings of Israel oppressed, delivered, and avenged.

When the Israelites who returned from the Babylonian exile, at which time this psalm was probably written, were conspired against and actively opposed by the disturbed and jealous Samaritans, the patriot poet, whose name has been lost, said, and in their use of his timely song the brave-hearted people repeated, that this was not the first instance by many of their being afflicted by enemies. The nation, in its life of a thousand years, had passed through numerous crises as severe and perilous as the present. "Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say: many a time have they afflicted me from my youth," from the day of the bitter bondage of the young nation in Egypt (Jer. ii. 2; xxii. 21; Ezek. xxiii. 3; Hosea ii. 15; xi. 1). They had been sorely vexed by Pharaoh, by the tribes north of the wilderness, by the Canaanites, Philistines, and Ammonites, by the Assyrians and Babylonians; and now they were tormented by the profane Samaritans. It was the old experience. Remembrance, tradition and history were angels of light and comfort among them, telling them

that as they had got through troubles before by the blessing of Jehovah, so they would emerge from them again.

The altered state in which they found the sacred hill may have called to mind the prophecy uttered more than a century and a half before, "Zion shall be plowed as a field" (Micah iii. 12). Like the disfigured mountain had Israel often suffered. The nation, in its early days, was punished with stripes asa slave in Egypt (Exod. v. 14-16). In following years many a Hebrew shoulder knew what it was to be torn by a tyrant's scourge. Whatever suggested the comparison, the song likens Israel's troubles, present and past, to the merciless flogging of slaves. "The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows."

Whose back? There is One in Whom we see all Israel. The psalm prophetically points to our incarnate Lord. A passage in the book of Hosea, which speaks of the childhood of Israel as spent in Egypt, is directly applied to the Holy Child Jesus in the New Testament (Hosea xi. 1; Matt. ii. 14, 15). Many a time after His forced sojourn in Egypt was He smitten by the adversary with concentrated effort (Luke iv. 13). He was especially tempted in the wilderness, in the garden, and on Golgotha. His tormentors actually dealt strokes upon His sacred person. A word in Isaiah, like this in the psalm, belongs to the Saviour. "I gave My back to the smiters" (Isa. l. 6). "Pilate took Jesus, and scourged Him" (John xix. 1).

"See! how His back the scourges tear,
While to the bloody pillar bound!
The ploughers make long furrows there,
Till all His body is one wound."

The afflictions of ancient Israel were the sympathizing Lord's, and He has since been smitten in the growing Church

"I am Jesus whom thou persecutest," He said to an enemy who turned into so true a friend that He afterwards said to him in effect, "I am Jesus persecuted in thee" (Acts ix. 5 2 Cor. i. 5; Phil. iii. 10; Col. i. 24). "The magistrates rent off the clothes" of Paul and Silas, "and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison" (Acts xvi. 22, 23, 33; v. 40). The apostle described himself "as a minister of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings" (2 Cor. vi. 4, 5). He wrote of his envious traducers, "Are they ministers of Christ? I am more" so than they; "in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten" by the Romans "with rods, once was I stoned" (2 Cor. xi. 23-25). On the backs of more than the first Christians have been ploughed long furrows. "Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say." Kings sought to beat me to death. Emperors said, "Bow down, that we may go over." I have been in the cruel hands of the Mohammedan oppressor, and am writhing at this moment under the Turkish lash. The Papal Antichrist has assailed me on Alpine heights, in French valleys, in Scotch glens, in English towns and villages,—wherever he could reach me with his murderous blows. What the psalm said of those in whom the righteous Lord protested "was true of many and many a martyr of His, first lashed with the terrible 'scorpion' and loaded whips; and then, as they hung on the Little Horse, torn with the hooked rake, which literally dug deep, long furrows in their bleeding and quivering flesh" (*Littledale*).

On the shoulders of our Methodist Israel, unmerited stripes

were inflicted in its youth of which the marks will be visible in the light of legal and historic records to the end of time; and as it grows to maturity it is sometimes treated with jealous discourtesy. Now and then it laughs at the missing hits of short-sighted prelates, and cries a little beneath the blundering blows of ecclesiastical judges; but on the whole it does not much mind the whistle-handled whips of its modern persecutors, being thankful that the wise and good are not against it, that it knows itself to be doing real service to the country and the world, that it always has the refuge of ultimate British law, and that there is as much reason as ever for its inspiring shout, "The best of all is, God is with us!"

Members of the Church in any of its forms can tell of heavy blows. Along the smooth surface of a field covered with grass and yellow flowers may be traced many a former furrow. Wesley in his old age was welcomed and honoured where in his early ministry he had been roughly treated. So with almost any venerable saint. We reverence the silvery locks and listen attentively to the golden words of the holy man once persecuted for the religion which is now his eloquence and praise. Recounting his experience, he takes us over furrow after furrow in an endless tale. "Many a time," says he, "have they afflicted me from my youth."

It will be remembered that a previous pilgrim-song opens, like this, with a significant repetition. "If it had not been the Lord Who was on our side, now may Israel say; if it had not been the Lord Who was on our side" (cxxiv.) The song now being considered begins with a lower note, but soon rises to the same music of praise and triumph. After describing Israel oppressed, it sings of Zion defended. If there had not been so many afflictions, there could not have been so many deliverances.

Israel, having alluded to the numerous enemies by whom he has been persecuted from his youth, bursts forth, "Yet they have not prevailed against me." They could not, because the Lord was on my side. As often as I have been hemmed in, He has made for me a way of escape. For the same reason they cannot crush me now. However cruel the scourge upon me, and however many the troubles that await me, He Who has rescued me so often will save me to the end. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. viii. 31.) "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge" (Psalm xlvi.)

The psalm returns to the low note of the unsparing plough, follows the prolonged wail of the increasing furrows, utters a piercing cry for the stripes on the naked back, and then resumes the music of freedom and salvation. "The Lord is righteous." He gives to all their due. The song says who are they whom He abides with and delivers. "He hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked," the cords of injustice and oppression with which Israel was bound like a slave. He has broken the sceptre of iniquity, not permitting it to "rest upon the lot of the righteous." "The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous; and His ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" (1 Peter iii. 12, 13). Not perfectly, but in comparison of his enemies, Israel was upright. In proportion to his likeness to the wicked Gentiles, the Lord, in love as well as justice, allowed him to be afflicted. In proportion to his possession of the image of God, He saved him from his troubles. There is nothing to abate in the statement of the preceding psalm: "Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord; that walketh in His ways." No

enemy shall rob him of his joy. God shall so sustain him, and bind up his wounds, that he shall be more holy and happy for the discipline of affliction. "Thou hast thrust sore at me, that I might fall: but the Lord helped me" (Psalm cxviii. 13).

The past is light on the present, and a prediction of the future. From what the Lord has so many times done for Israel, it may be judged what He is about to do, and will always do for him, in trouble and danger. He will avenge His people. The latter half of the psalm is a triumphant burst of confidence and expectation. They who would inflict evil upon Zion miss the good they aim at for themselves. Their malice returns upon them in disappointment and destruction. We may either read, "Let them," or "They shall all be confounded and turned back that hate Zion." Whether a wish, an imprecation, or a prophecy, the words point to an inevitable consequence. According to the will and law of the Lord, while such as fear Him and walk in His ways shall be blessed, they shall be cursed who fear neither God nor man, but are evildoers and persecutors (Gen. xxiv. 60; Job xxxiv. 20, 21; Psalm lxx. 2).

An emblem of Israel blest by the Lord is a wide field of thickly-growing corn stirred by gentle breezes under a ripening sun. As the labourers, humming or shouting snatches of cheery song, bind the sheaves, and carry load after load away, they receive friendly salutations from people passing by. Nearly two hundred years before this psalm was produced, Isaiah sketched the pride, impotence and ruin of Israel's foes. They that hate Zion are "as the grass on the housetops, and as corn blasted before it be grown up" (Isa. xxxvii. 27). The flat roof of an Eastern dwelling is no more the place for vegetation than Jerusalem is a proper field for Gentile and Samaritan ploughers; but so long as there are winds to blow particles of earth into crevices and corners, dews and showers

to moisten the drifted dust, and birds of the air to sow seeds, the best cemented housetop is not proof against the appearance of straggling and struggling blades. The enemies of Israel shall be "as the grass upon the housetops, which withereth afore it groweth up," which for want of nourishment at the roots dries and dies before it can be pulled: "wherewith the mower filleth not his hand; nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom." Let who will express approbation of the salutations interchanged by Mohammedans when they meet, so long as they do not speak of them as if they originated with Turks and Moors. Such greetings are the remnant, in many countries, of a beautiful primitive custom. The book of Ruth supplies a delightful glimpse of a harvest-field thirteen hundred years before the Christian era. "Behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The Lord be with you. And they answered him, The Lord bless thee" (Ruth ii. 4). The thought is ridiculous of house-top harvesting occasioning such benedictions. Equally out of question is it for the Church's adversaries to be blessed by God or man. "Neither do they which go by say, The blessing of the Lord be upon you: we bless you in the name of the Lord."

In this psalm is audible the voice of the Master of the country and Owner of all the wheat. He Who said, "The harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels," pointing onwards to the great day when Israel shall be gathered home, and all who hate the Lord and Zion shall be cast like tares into the fire, gives in this hymn a word of encouragement to His harassed people. How fit it was for the pilgrims to repeat, as the appearance of the fields through which they passed between their dwellings and the holy mountain brought it to their recollection! No harm can come to Israel from the long furrows on his back. The Church owes

much of its purity and strength to God's tillage in martyrdom. The day is approaching when Zion's Lord "shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isa. liii. 11; Psalm cxxvi. 6; Matt. xiii. 37-43). Let the saint and Church be bravely patient till the harvest-home.

They who aim at a divided life, trying to stay in the Church, and yet to please the world, may hear in the psalm, as if also from the lips of Jesus, a loving caution. Whoever would share with Israel in the blessing of the Lord, must not parley with the haters of Zion, as Balaam listened to Balak. Let us not be deluded by the smiles and promises of the wicked, but remember that "the wages of sin is death." "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ," avoid his company. "Neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (2 John 9-11). Side wholly with the Lord and Israel, in faith like that of Moses, who, "when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward" (Heb. xi. 24-26). To the righteous Lord, Who cuts asunder the cords of the wicked, and saves the upright in heart, be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

So happy they who God obey,
 Are only sinners sad?
Nay, His true servants often may
 Be sorrowful while glad.

Sin's joy but keeps its grief from sight,
 Like gilt o'er rotten wood:
As dust dims gold, distress may light
 To hide the face of good.

Oft from my youth, may Israel say,
The wicked have assailed;
But, from the dire Egyptian day,
They never have prevailed.

Upon my back the ploughers ploughed,
And drew their furrows long;
And made me call on God aloud
Beneath their tearing thong.

Severe the lash of Pharaoh fell,
Of Canaanites the blows,
Of those in Babylon who dwell,
As of my present foes.

My sorrows were the righteous Lord's;
He heard my trustful cry,
Asunder cut the captive's cords,
And made the smiters fly.

And He again will vindicate
The just for whom I pray,
Confounding all who Zion hate,
And casting them away.

The scanty grass, that sickly tries
To make the house-top green,
For lack of earth attains no size,
But fades as soon as seen.

Whate'er the show, there's nothing there
The mower's hand can take;
No sheaf the reaper's arms can bear,
No cause to merry make.

No harvest company allures
By-passers to exclaim,

The blessing of the Lord be yours:
We bless you in His name.

The feeble blade will soon be dried,
The root can find no room:
The foe may lift himself in pride,
But such his certain doom.

XI.

HYMN OF REPENTANCE.

"1. Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O LORD.
2. Lord, hear my voice:
Let Thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.
3. If Thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities,
O Lord, who shall stand?
4. But there is forgiveness with Thee,
That Thou mayest be feared.
5. I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait,
And in His word do I hope.
6. My soul waiteth for the Lord
More than they that watch for the morning:
I say, more than they that watch for the morning.
7. Let Israel hope in the LORD:
For with the LORD there is mercy,
And with Him is plenteous redemption.
8. And He shall redeem Israel
From all his iniquities."

—PSALM CXXX.

WHILE it is true, as the preceding psalm led us to remark, that even good people are liable to affliction, that, indeed, "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth," yet the soul must be careful not to make a false refuge of this fact in the mystery of Divine Providence. Sorrow and sickness are to the impenitent instalments of death, "the wages of sin"; and when a cloud darkens our path, or we are pierced by pain, or prostrate in weakness, instead of seeking comfort in fancied innocence, and in the inscrutableness of God's deal-

ings, we ought to remember that we were "shapen in iniquity," and to consider whether we are ready for the awful day of final reckoning. It becomes us to "watch for the morning."

The psalm before us, like the other pilgrim-songs, implies circumstances of bitterness; but it is, as in truth is each of them, more than a cry occasioned by outward hardship and danger. The sixth of the seven penitential psalms, so styled by way of eminence, and not with a meaning that there are no other psalms of penitence,—this is intensely spiritual. It is at once a soliloquy, a petition, a statement, and an exhortation, a hymn for private use and public service, the voice of the soul and of the congregation. The former half is an address to the Lord: the latter is, first a profession of hope and expectation in His mercy, and then an argued invitation to the mind and course described as happily adopted. Throughout it is the language of deep distress on account of sin, a prayer for compassion and forgiveness, and an expression of trust in the promises and provisions of God's love. And it is not a formal song languishing and dying on cold lips, but an importunate and earnest exercise of heart-devotion.

A hymn of penitence was indispensable in the pilgrims' song-book. However many of those who attended the feasts in Jerusalem tripped thoughtlessly over the changing ground, there were some who considered what was implied in the existence of the Temple and their periodical visits to its altars. Surely the least meditative had their solemn moments, and numbers who began in carelessness ended in deep concern. Sorrow for sin and desire after holiness wanted sacred song for expression. In this hymn of repentance, hummed in pensive loneliness or repeated in grave concert, sighs shaped themselves, and serious wishes found sweet language.

Passing through deep waters is a scriptural figure, often used by Christians to signify profound distress. The psalm begins with it. It is the voice of a grief of "depths." "Out of the depths have I cried" (Psalm lxxxviii. 6, 7). The depths are not merely those of temporal affliction, which are sometimes comparatively clear, but waters foul with sin, "an horrible pit," "miry clay" (Psalm xl. 2). "I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing. Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink" (Psalm lxix. 2, 14). I am in unfathomable wretchedness and danger on account of conscious guilt and corruption. "If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" who would not sink beneath his weight of self-condemnation and shame? who could hope to be acquitted in the judgment day? (Nah. i. 6; Mal. iii. 2). "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John i. 8). We do not say so. The truth of our sad case is too apparent. Instead of deceiving, we condemn ourselves. We are immersed in iniquity, and sinking therein deeper and deeper. "We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, which we, from time to time, most grievously have committed, by thought, word, and deed, against Thy Divine Majesty, provoking most justly Thy wrath and indignation against us. We do earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings; the remembrance of them is grievous unto us; the burden of them is intolerable."

The soul speaks to God. "Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord." What has the distressed soul to say? A cry of murmuring or excuse, provoking God's greater anger, and adding to the load of guilt, would not lift the sinner out of the horrible pit, but sink him into deeper, darker and fouler depths. It is not so unjust and fatal a cry, but the voice of a soul repenting, and therefore

unable to utter a syllable of censure or extenuation. It is the appeal of a drowning spirit, struggling in the only way to escape. To cry to God in sorrow for sin, is to pray for deliverance from it. The psalm is a petition for mercy. O Lord, let Thine eyes see, not my transgressions, but my wretchedness. Listen to my confessions and prayers (2 Chron. vi. 40). "Lord, hear my voice: let Thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities." Shouldest? Thou hast noted them in Thy omniscience already. "Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance" (Psalm xc. 8; Job x. 14; xiv. 16). But I implore Thee not to take account of them for punishment. If Thou shouldest do that, there is no salvation for me. "If Thou, Lord," in that sense, "shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" I dare not face Thy justice. I cannot bear what I deserve. I beg Thy pardoning mercy. "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant: for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified" (Psalm cxliii. 2). "God, be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke xviii. 13).

Is that possible? Can the righteous Lord show mercy to a sinful soul? Can He not? Holiness and Power, He is also Wisdom and Love. Thou couldest, O Lord, pass sentence on me who am self-condemned, and I should be justly left sinking in the depths. "But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared." How so? Does not the awakened sinner, while unforgiven, fear the Lord? Why should the pardoned sinner fear Him? Is not fear of God the bitterness of repentance? It is; but it is the sweetness of it too. Does it not make the guilty soul afraid to behold His face? It does; but it draws the penitent to His feet. "Who would not fear Thee, O king of nations?" (Jer. x. 7.) A fear of God compatible with happiness is that

for which the repenting soul here longs. It is the fear which was defined in a preceding song: "Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord, that walketh in His ways." If any suppose that there is no fear of God in religion, they are terribly mistaken. Not that which makes devils tremble, but that which throws the holy angels prostrate, is the fear of God here coveted. Repentance is transition from the fear of terror, which produces and increases hatred, into the fear of admiring gratitude and affection, which is eager to render service. With the sense of God's forgiving mercy is acquired a spirit of loving and obedient reverence. "There is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared," as Thy children fear Thee, as they fear Thee whose feet are upon the rock, as I have not feared Thee sufficiently in the past, but want to fear Thee in the future, and am learning to fear Thee now. Give me this fear, O Lord, this deliverance from guilty dread, this life of thankful, joyful, loving, filial fear,—O give this fear to me, and then I, even I, shall stand up in Thy presence, and in the judgment-day. The new song will be in my mouth: "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings" (Psalm xl. 2, 3). God's pardon of sin is a transaction so full of mystery and majesty, that it cannot be meditated upon without lowly astonishment. The fearful glory of Jehovah's name is revealed in His turning from His fierce wrath (Exod. xxxii. 12). Religion is the fear of God,—

"The seeing eye, the feeling sense,
The mystic joys of penitence;

"The godly grief, the pleasing smart,
The meltings of a broken heart,
The tears that tell your sins forgiven,
The sighs that waft your souls to heaven;

"The guiltless shame, the sweet distress,
The unutterable tenderness,
The genuine, meek humility,
The wonder, 'Why such love to me?'

"The o'erwhelming power of saving grace,
The sight that veils the seraph's face;
The speechless awe that dares not move,
And all the silent heaven of love."

The doctrine of the pilgrim-poet might seem to be contradicted by St. John, when he says, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love" (1 John iv. 18). The words "hath torment" show what fear the apostle means,—the fear of terror, not that of reverence; the fear of receiving punishment, not that of displeasing God; the fear of the hopeless criminal, not that of the repenting and loving child. He no more varies from the Psalmist concerning fear and love, than James from Paul in regard to faith and works. Their teaching is the same, from different points of view. If ever any one had the fear of God spoken of in the song, as based on confidence in His justifying mercy, it was the loving disciple whom Jesus loved.

Is any hint given as to when and where this prayer of penitence and confession should be presented? The deep waters are the place, and when we are sinking is the time, for thus deprecating judgment, imploring mercy, and begging that the fear of guilty dread may be displaced by that of holy attachment and joy. Jonah did not wait till he could kneel on a carpet or consult a priest, but says, "I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and He heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and Thou heardest my voice" (Jonah ii. 2). Before Him Who looks forth from between the cherubim all penitents are present in the common Mediator;

and He can as easily hear the cry of a drowning man in the midst of the far-off sea as that of a worshipper in His house. But this fact, full of comfort to the feeble and afflicted, is no apology for loose and slovenly devotion. Jonah in his heart thought of the sanctuary all the while. "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto Thee, into Thine holy temple" (Jonah ii. 7). Our psalm was not composed for private use only, but, like the rest, for social repetition and public service. (Psalm v. 7; xxvii. 4; xxviii. 2.) The voice of the prodigal is in it, "I will arise, and go to my Father." Any one truly repenting feels that he would be dishonouring God if he should purposely keep from His "holy oracle." From the depths of trouble, the praying soul will find the way, if possible, to the house of prayer.

This appeal of the penitent for mercy and forgiveness is not wild and groundless, but finds footing in the promises and provisions of God's love and wisdom. It is a prayer of reasonable and cordial trust. "In His word do I hope." He has been beforehand with me, having spoken His promise ere I made my cry. Else how could I have prayed? It is from what He has said, that I am sure there is forgiveness for me. (Psalm cxix. 74, 81, 82, 114, 117.) All His sayings to the Israelites, and all His dealings with them, showed His redeeming pity. I put my faith in that adorable name of His, which He so solemnly proclaimed, and which pervades revelation: "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7). The righteous Lord can pardon consistently with His holiness, and waits to be gracious. I therefore cannot pray in vain. He hears me, and I am safe. "Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is

mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption. And He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities." However many our sins, they shall be forgiven. However polluted our souls, He will make us new creatures.

They who are truly concerned to receive what God has promised are never more in earnest than when appealing to Him for the fulfilment of His word. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matt. xi. 12). It may be a protracted struggle. This prayer of repentance and faith is more than the excitement of a moment. The past and the future are in the Psalm, as well as the present. It breathes the patience of hope. Its statement is, I have prayed, am praying, and will pray. Our hands must not fall in supplication, our wings must not droop in song, our spirit must not faint in devotion. "Behold," said the risen Saviour, "I send the promise of My Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luke xxiv. 49). "Wait for the promise of the Father, which ye have heard of Me. Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (Acts i. 4, 5). Nine days passed, and the disciples were yet expecting. How well for them that they did not give up their hope at the end of the ninth day! When the tenth day came, and they were still relying upon the Master's word, they suddenly received the blessing. Such is the attitude of the Israelite in this pilgrim-song: "I wait for the Lord." I have been waiting for Him, am waiting, and will wait. As only He could make the promise, and only He can bestow the grace, so, now, or ten days hence, or more, or fewer, only He can select the moment for my deliverance. He will certainly fulfil His word, wherein He has caused me to hope; and I mean to wait till He shall do so. I despair not, but believe.

As if "I wait" were too feeble an expression, the poet immediately adds, "My soul doth wait." My very soul is in my prayer for saving mercy. "My soul waiteth for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning." It is an emphatic repetition, signifying that what is affirmed is not an exaggeration. The priest staying in the temple for the moment of the early oblation, the warder on the tower looking for the first streak of day, the benighted traveller unable to take another step till the long darkness shall be over, the sick man sleeplessly longing for the family to be astir, the mariner wanting the light that he may examine the doubtful coast,—not one of them so earnestly hopes for the morning, which will end his watch, as my soul waits for the Lord, Who forgives repented iniquity.

That which is prayed and watched for is a great and enduring good, worthy of ardent and patient hope. "Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun" (Eccles. xi. 7; Psalm cvii. 14; Acts xxvi. 18; 1 Peter ii. 9; 1 John ii. 8). The cry of the soul from the dark depths of guilt and corruption is for escape into the marvellous light of God's saving mercy. Let the strife be genuine. Small piety sometimes results from large penitence. People who bellowed for the light command the Sun of Righteousness not to come too far forth from the door of His chamber. Was so vast an agony wanted for their inappreciable reformation, their fond hanging on to the skirts of darkness, their clinging to the old fear that hath torment, their easy, dreamy, lasting dawn of religion, their self-complacent creed that in the present life perfection is unattainable? Did their souls watch for the Lord as eagerly as their voices called Him to fulfil His promise? The kingdom of heaven which the violence of the psalm would take

by force is plenteous redemption, salvation from all iniquity, an experience of noontide holiness.

The psalm is often fitly repeated with solemn music as a hymn for the soul passing from the night of death into the glory of eternal day. After Jesus, Who rose from the tomb like Jonah out of the deep waters, the saint leaves the dark river and ascends the bright and beautiful banks of immortality. Sanctified for heaven, the Israelite says: "Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth; my flesh also shall rest in hope. For Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt Thou suffer Thine holy one to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life: in Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Psalm xvi. 9-11). Chanting this *de profundis*, we commit the ransomed dust to the ground in "sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ," and ourselves "watch for the morning."

A sign of conversion is zeal for the rescue of others. His own feet safe on the rock, the Israelite is immediately concerned for the salvation of friends and neighbours yet sinking in the miry pit of sin and perdition. He tells them how he cried, and was delivered, and that they may pray with equal confidence and success. Oh, do as I have done, he says. I was distressed as you are; and you may be saved as I am. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isa. lv. 7). "Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption. And He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities."

How exactly this pilgrim-song agrees with our Christian

hymns! The comfortable impression revives that saints in all ages serve God alike, and that religion is ever the same. The New Testament is in the Old, and the Old continues in the New. The Gospel of Jesus Christ pervades the Law and Prophets and Psalms, and blends them with the apostles' writings in one Holy Bible. We cannot much wonder that Luther called this a Pauline song. It expresses the Church's creed, contains our system of theology, and shows the way of salvation, insisting on self-knowledge, or the conviction of sin, repentance in sorrow for it, and effort after newness of life, faith in the word of the Lord pleading it in patient prayer, reliance on His redeeming mercy for conscious pardon and justification, the gradual and complete sanctification of believers by His grace, the adequacy of His power and love to save all men from all sin, and the reflection of His charity in the zeal of His people for the world's salvation. "As it is written," says the New Testament, speaking for its own the doctrine of the Old, "there shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is My covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins" (Rom. xi. 26, 27; iii. 25, 26; Matt. i. 21; Titus ii. 14).

A sacred Presence in this psalm asks the conscience a succession of important questions. Have you been in depths of distress on account of sin? Did you cry to the Lord to deliver you from the deep waters? Have you given up all thought of escaping by your own righteousness? Is all your appeal to God's redeeming mercy? Have you so firm a trust in His word that you are sure your salvation is nigh? Are you contentedly waiting and watching till He shall give you His promised blessing? Is your heart set upon the full daylight of "holiness unto the Lord"? Not murmuring at His seeming delay, are you exhorting your

neighbours to patiently desire His appearing? Are you showing them that "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day"? If so, give praise to Christ, Whose Spirit is with you, and rejoice before your Heavenly Father.

From depths of self-despair
Thy succour, Lord, I crave,
Where only Thou can'st hear my prayer,
Whence only Thou can'st save.

Thy saints forget not Thee,
Nor are by Thee forgot,
And yet Thou hast an ear for me,
As if Thou heard'st them not.

O gracious Lord, attend
To my imploring cry;
To me in loving-kindness bend,
And bring salvation nigh.

If strictly Thou, O Lord,
Should'st mark iniquity,
Who would not sink, by Thee abhorr'd?
Who could acquitted be?

But Thou can'st sin forgive,
Tormenting dread remove,
And make the reverent spirit live
A life of filial love.

When will my voice be heard,
My soul's confiding cry?
I hope in the unfailing word
Of Him Who cannot lie.

My soul His love desires
More earnestly than they

Whom the slow march of darkness tires
 Await the break of day.

No pilgrim in the night,
 No watchman on the wall,
So truly longs for morning light
 As I for mercy call.

The wished-for day begins,
 My agony is past:
The Lord absolves me from my sins;
 His mercy's mine at last.

On Him let Israel call,
 And help from Him receive;
His grace sufficient is for all
 Who in His name believe.

Our deepest guilt and stains
 He plenteously forgives,
Till nought of sin in us remains,
 But He within us lives.

XII.

LOWLINESS AND MEEKNESS.

"1. LORD, my heart is not haughty,
Nor mine eyes lofty:
Neither do I exercise myself in great matters,
Or in things too high for me.
2. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself,
As a child that is weaned of his mother:
My soul is even as a weaned child.
3. Let Israel hope in the LORD
From henceforth and for ever."

—PSALM CXXXI.

THE compiler of the Songs of Degrees saw a connection between this psalm of David, and the anonymous hymn preceding; for each of them contains the exhortation, "Let Israel hope in the Lord." He seems to have regarded that, and may himself have composed it, as a fit introduction to the present. The same spirit of patient trust and love breathes in them both; but in David's the situation appears to be more happy.

Different stages in the career of the son of Jesse are pointed out as the occasion of the psalm. One is when Saul and his servants treated him as an aspirant to the crown. Not so, he seems here to say. The Lord knows that I am not traitorous and ambitious. If I fight, it is in self-defence, not for self-exaltation; and I would be content never to war at all. I am in the hands of Providence. Another time in his life selected, with some countenance in the fact that it

is the theme of the next psalm, is when he brought up the ark to the new sanctuary on Mount Zion. Queen Michal disdainfully rebuking him for having put off his royal dress, and led a religious procession or dance, he answered, in the spirit of the song, "It was before the Lord. And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight" (2 Sam. vi. 21, 22). Equally well the psalm may agree with other situations in his history. Disclaiming pride, showing humility, and recommending hope in the Lord, it is a permanent song of Israel, suitable for all seasons.

From the point of view of those for whom the Songs of Ascents were collected, a meaning of this psalm seems to be that, though brought back to their own land, yet the Israelites must not be a haughty and defiant people. If everything, as they might hastily assume, were as good as accomplished in their return, even if, as was not the case, the Temple and city had been rebuilt, and the throne re-established, it was indispensable for them to be self-restrained and humble. But they had too great proof that they were far from having attained perfect success and security as a nation, and could not fail to perceive that the day would never arrive when it would not be their duty, as a people and as individuals, to hope in the Lord. Looking at the place of the psalm towards the close of the book, after the hymn of penitential watching for Jehovah, and before a solemn song in the shadow of His Temple, it is like a summons to the yearly pilgrims to finish their journey with subdued and ordered thoughts, and enter the sanctuary in a reverential spirit. "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God" (Eccles. v. 1).

Pride is a disease of the heart. David offers a sound heart to the Lord. "Lord, my heart is not haughty." In

the same way he submits himself to the Physician when he says in another psalm, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm cxxxix. 23, 24). It is like St. Peter's appeal: "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee" (John xxi. 17). Symptoms of the heart-disease are mentioned. When pride is in possession, its presence is not easily concealed. From its throne in the heart, the demon looks out, down and up, through the eyes. "Nor mine eyes lofty." In three respects the eyes of the proud are lofty.

People who have pride in their hearts hold their heads as high as they can in the attempt to look down upon supposed inferiors. So the Pharisee despised the publican. So the Jew threw glances of disdain upon the Samaritan. So the Brahmin contemns the Pariah. So sometimes, not always, the rich look down upon the poor, and the learned upon the unknowing. The effect is ridiculous, when the high-minded persons are really little of stature, when the plutocrat is more ignorant than the sage beneath his notice, when the philosopher is more indigent than the squire whom he disparages, when the hypocrite is less religious than the man whom he calls a sinner. Not thus lofty were the eyes, because not haughty was the heart, of the good tax-gatherer whom the Lord commended. "The publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven."

The proud look up to superiors with envy, to higher estates than their own with ambition, to objects beyond their understanding with self-sufficiency. They cannot use David's words, "Neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me." "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me: it is high, I cannot attain unto it"

(Psalm cxxxix. 6). Nothing is too wonderful for some tall people, nothing beyond their reach. It is their habit to "walk" in large directions, and meddle with matters too "wonderful" for comprehension. They look too far and high to acknowledge the marvels of creation, providence and religion, in the midst of which they have been placed by their forgotten Creator. Their eyes are too lofty to recognize mysteries even in the most sublime regions. They settle the origin and destiny of the human race in a conversation, and extinguish in a moment the flames of eternal judgment. Their reason is too soaring to admit that revelations which they cannot grasp may be in thorough harmony with perfect reason. "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision."

Pride looks up with eyes of lofty insolence to the Eternal. It is a usurper; for the heart which it occupies belongs of right to Jehovah. "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts" (Psalm x. 4). "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God," but the fool himself (Psalm xiv. 1). He will shape his own ends, and thank his own wits. In prosperity he forgets its source, and in enterprise denies that the Lord is our wisdom and strength. "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: then he forsook God Which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation" (Deut. xxxii. 15; 2 Chron. xxvi. 16; Mal. ii. 17).

Disallowing pride in himself, David would not tolerate it in his servants. "Him that hath a high look and a proud heart will not I suffer" (Psalm ci. 5). He knew that the Lord hateth "a proud look" (Prov. vi. 16, 17). "Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord" (Prov. xvi. 5). "An high look, and a proud heart, is sin" (Prov. xxi. 4). To cherish this sin is to refuse God's bless-

ing and invite His curse. "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Psalm cxxxviii. 6; Prov. xvi. 18; xxix. 23; James iv. 6). God will "bring down high looks" (Psalm xviii. 27). "He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts" (Luke i. 51). Uzziah's "heart was lifted up to his destruction" (2 Chron. xxvi. 16). Hezekiah's "heart was lifted up: therefore there was wrath upon him" (2 Chron. xxxii. 25). The pride of Korah buried him alive; Haman's hung him on his own gallows fifty cubits high; Nebuchadnezzar's drove him from men to eat grass as oxen; that of Simon Magus sank him deeper into the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity; and that of Herod Agrippa caused him to be eaten alive of worms. Happy are they who can say with David, "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me."

There is safety in a lowly and docile spirit. "Surely I have behaved and quieted myself," smoothed and stilled "my soul," "as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child." The reference is not to the time of the child's being weaned, but to the next stage in his life, when, having been obliged to go through his first great exercise of self-denial, he is upon his feet, and begins to prattle his own views and purposes, and to lift food to his mouth. His independence of his watchful parent is yet remote. She never trusts him out of sight, and he is only happy in her presence. Weariness soon comes over him; inexperience causes him many a bruise, and feebleness many a fall; and he continually encounters fears. The bosom which in a sense he has forgotten, is scarcely less his life than it was before. Still his mother finds him meat and shelter. Her face is his illuminated book, and her voice his

wisdom, law and music. In her embrace his tears and sufferings cease, on her lap he defies the universe, and in her strong warm arms he welcomes rest.

The Church or saint is thus foolish, feeble and dependent. The Lord has taken care of the child till he can walk, talk and handle; but he is yet a little one, and must make no pretence to self-sufficiency. Whatever ignorance has been removed, and whatever powers have been acquired, he must gladly continue to live and move and have his being in God. Everything that has been done for him, the Lord has done; and everything that remains to do for him must be done by the Lord. He may never trust in his own schemes and efforts, but must always look to the Wise for wisdom and the Strong for strength. As the weaned child yet lovingly clings to his mother, so is he to worship and serve the Spring of all his hopes and joys. His duty is to "behave" himself before God, as the word implies, keep his soul even (Isa. xxviii. 25; xl. 4), and be quiet in confidence and attention when and because the Lord speaks. "Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if He call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place" (1 Sam. iii. 9).

Lowliness is recommended throughout the Bible in statements, precepts and examples; and passages which show the danger of pride proclaim the blessedness of humility. Without it nothing is pleasing to God. Our incarnate Lord taught it by example, symbol, and speech. He called little children unto Him, set them before Him in the midst of the disciples and people, took them up in His arms, put His hands upon them, and blessed them, and said while He did so, "Of such is the kingdom of God." "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall

humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. xviii. 1-6; Mark x. 13-16). Childlikeness is not childishness, but the halo of the saint, the likeness of the angel, the mind that was in Christ. A subdued and quiet spirit is serenity at home, equanimity in business, wisdom in learning, God's pursuing smile. The character of the weaned child before the Father of spirits should be retained in youth, through manhood, and into age, growing more and more in heavenly promise. We have seen the thoughtless boy throw it off to play the man, so developing into youth without beauty, and maturity without bloom. We have seen the thoughtful man regain the child-like spirit, and so recover manhood's glory. We think we have seen intelligent simplicity rising with life, strengthening with strength, a tree of righteousness, not twisted by storms, not disfigured by blights,—symmetrical, umbrageous, continually in blossom, always rich with fruit. Why should not the watchful soul, ransomed by the Son, endued with the Spirit, loved by the Father, be childlike to the end? O Wisdom of God, our Pattern and Saviour, Whose love surpasses that of women, and on Whom we more depend than the weaned child on his mother, we would listen to Thy guiding voice, cling to Thee with even and peaceful hearts, and be little children in Thy protecting arms. (Psalm xviii. 27; li. 17; cxxxviii. 6; Prov. xi. 2; xvi. 19; xviii. 12; xxii. 4; Isa. lvii. 15; Micah vi. 8; Matt. xi. 29; xxiii. 12; Luke xviii. 14; Rom. xii. 3, 10, 16; Eph. iv. 2; Phil. ii. 3; Col. iii. 12; James iv. 10; 1 Peter v. 5.)

This psalm says, like the last, "Let Israel hope in the Lord." The connection of the words shows that it must be with the simple trust and attachment of an unpretending child. In whom may the child confide, if not in his attentive mother? All ages have sung the deserved praises of

self-sacrificing maternal affection; but even a woman's love for her offspring is inferior to that of God to His people. It is more reasonable for the saint to hope in the Lord, than for the child to rely on his parent. We have His gracious assurance that He loves His childlike worshippers, teaches them to go, taking them by their arms, and draws them with cords of a man, with bands of love (Hosea xi. 1, 3, 4). "Can a woman forget her sucking child," or neglect her little one when weaned, "that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands" (Isa. xlix. 15, 16).

To the exhortation in this psalm are appended the words "from henceforth," or "from now," "and for ever." The weanling grows to man's estate, and gradually ceases to be dependent on his parent; but never will Israel be better than a little child before Jehovah, deriving from Him life and breath, and all things; and God will never change towards His Church and people. Childlike hope in Him must be continued. "Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." Murderous emissaries may snatch innocents from their feeble mothers in Bethlehem, and cause Rachel to weep for her children, and refuse to be comforted, because they are not; but none shall tear saints from their shelter in the Rock of Ages (Isa. xxvi. 4, mar.). None shall pluck the lamb out of the arms of the Good Shepherd. The gates of hell shall not prevail against those who "hope in the Lord from henceforth and for ever."

His wisdom justifies hope, as well as His love and might. Parents who may be thought to know what is good for their offspring make serious mistakes in bringing them up. Educating Israel, guiding the Church, conducting the

pilgrim, God cannot err. The little child who feels safe with his mother even in the crowd or the darkness, she frequently leads wrong. They never go astray who follow the Lord with filial confidence. He knows perfectly the course to us unknown. It is that which He has chosen for us, and every step in it is towards heaven; and He is Himself our unfailing Guide therein Who took Israel through bondage, the sea, the desert, the river, privations and wars, to the promised land. He holds our hand Who, in spite of Saul, by various adventures and perils, raised David to the throne. Hindrances are reasons why we should hope in the Lord, Who only can make crooked ways straight for us, and rough places plain. Let us follow Him with child-like simplicity and trust.

> "I would not have the restless will
> That hurries to and fro,
> Seeking for some great thing to do,
> Or secret thing to know;
> I would be treated as a child,
> And guided where I go."

It is proper for the weaned child to have his toys. Are they not his tools? That is his work which we call his play, and higher beings may call that our play which is our work. The psalm requires us to fulfil the duties of our years and station, neither craving past indulgences, as if we had not grown out of inferior modes and means of existence, nor discontentedly stretching beyond our Providential lot and calling, as if we had made greater progress than we have as rational and responsible creatures. The man who has not ceased to speak, understand and think as a child, or the escaped Israelite who yets longs for the flesh-pots of Egypt, Philistine associations, or the gardens of

Babylon, is no more blameworthy or ridiculous than any person affecting to be in the secrets and to talk the language of the immortals. It as much becomes the geologist to strike the rock with his hammer as the blacksmith to make the sparks fly from the hot iron, and the physiologist or naturalist as legitimately uses the magnifying glass as the watchmaker or the inspector of fabrics; but men of science have to be not less careful than artizans, tradesmen and manufacturers that they do not mistake the work of their hands for the universe, their fancies and inventions for realities and revelations, and themselves for the Divine Being. However good a thing, it is not an impregnable castle which the weaned child has put together; it is a house of cards, and he will build another presently with the same material. They do not deserve the name of philosophers who allow of no appeal from their clever books, which were written yesterday, and will be revised and corrected to-morrow, and superseded the day after. That the heart be not haughty, nor the eyes lofty, that none exercise themselves proudly and self-sufficiently in things too great and wonderful for them, that it be remembered and acknowledged "that God is, and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him," and that His might, mercy and wisdom, are reasons for hoping in Him "from henceforth and for ever,"—this is the instruction in the sacred song for men, women and children, for saints, workers and sages. Let God be praised, Who pities them that fear Him, and never forgets His humble people.

O Lord, I let not pride arise
 And in my heart complain;
Nor look abroad with lofty eyes
 Of envy or disdain.

'Tis Thou shalt measure my estate,
And limit my degree:
I will not walk in things too great
Or wonderful for me.

The mother o'er her weanling bends,
His law her wiser will;
So humbly on the Lord depends
My soul subdued and still.

The child that finds his hands and feet,
Yet loves his parent's arms,
From weariness his swift retreat,
From sorrows and alarms.

So to the yearning Lord I fly,
His goodness to adore;
Let Israel on His word rely
Henceforth and evermore.

XIII.

THE COVENANT WITH DAVID.

"1. LORD, remember David,
And all his afflictions:
2. How he sware unto the LORD,
And vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob;
3. Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house,
Nor go up into my bed;
4. I will not give sleep to mine eyes,
Or slumber to mine eyelids,
5. Until I find out a place for the LORD,
An habitation for the mighty God of Jacob.
6. Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah:
We found it in the fields of the wood.
7. We will go into His tabernacles:
We will worship at His footstool.
8. Arise, O LORD, into Thy rest;
Thou, and the ark of Thy strength.
9. Let Thy priests be clothed with righteousness;
And let Thy saints shout for joy.
10. For Thy servant David's sake
Turn not away the face of Thine anointed.
11. The LORD hath sworn in truth unto David;
He will not turn from it;
Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne.
12. If thy children will keep My covenant
And My testimony that I shall teach them,
Their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore.
13. For the LORD hath chosen Zion;
He hath desired it for His habitation.
14. This is My rest for ever:
Here will I dwell; for I have desired it.

15. I will abundantly bless her provision:
 I will satisfy her poor with bread.
16. I will also clothe her priests with salvation:
 And her saints shall shout aloud for joy.
17. There will I make the horn of David to bud:
 I have ordained a lamp for Mine anointed.
18. His enemies will I clothe with shame:
 But upon himself shall his crown flourish."

—PSALM CXXXII.

IT is not likely that the author of this psalm was the son of Jesse; for it urges a plea which he would scarcely use ("for Thy servant David's sake"), and contains many words from Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple. Whoever the poet was, that prayer was evidently present in his recollection, and the foundation of this form of devotion. (With verses 1, 8-10, 13, 16, comp. 2 Chron. vi. 6, 16, 41, 42.) Yet neither is it easy to accept the opinion that it was written wholly by Solomon; for it implies adversity to which his reign was a contrast. In his dedicatory prayer he praised God for having so far fulfilled His promise to his father, and besought that, according to the gracious covenant, He would not fail to keep the throne of Israel in the possession of David's descendants (2 Chron. vi. 4, 15-17). Beginning, "Lord, remember David," this song seems to have been produced when and because the throne was vacant, and there was the temptation to conclude that God had forgotten His promise. One of the anonymous compositions which form the bulk of the pilgrim-hymns, it suits, like the others, the case of the Israelites who had returned from captivity, and in the face of tremendous difficulties were attempting to rebuild the Temple, and hoping to reoccupy and cultivate the country. The thoughts natural in their situation are expressed most appropriately.

Well worthy of its place among the Songs of Degrees, it

is not a psalm for a season only, but an unfailing treasure for permanent possession and use. Year after year, as the festivals came round, pilgrims would choose to repeat it when in act or intention they approached the sanctuary. It was admirably fitted to express the sorrows and hopes of the Jews during the time of our Lord, when their sceptre had been broken by the iron hand of the Romans; and we can imagine their posterity in the present day mournfully chanting it as peculiarly appropriate to their scattered condition. Oh that, speaking in it to Jehovah, they would also hear His Spirit speak therein to themselves, telling them of the Son of David anointed King for ever! For all who accept the rule of the Messiah, it is a song of faith whenever the Church is depressed; and it is meet for private Christians when tempted by fears and failures. As we read its golden words, and let it tell its own story, this longest of the fifteen pilgrim-psalms sings of David's thought for Jehovah, the Lord's promise to His anointed, the fulfilment of His covenant in Christ, and the ground of hope for Israel.

The Psalmist, daring to remind the Lord of His covenant, introduces David as saying how he had first known of the Ark, and what he had purposed and done to honour the symbol of Jehovah's supremacy and presence. "Lord, remember David, and all his afflictions" or solicitudes, the anxiety he felt, and the pains he took to build Thee as good a sanctuary as was in his power, and make all possible preparation for a better. His pious care was so intense that it became a solemn oath. "How he sware unto the Lord, and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob." Much in his history implies this vow, but the actual taking of it is not recorded (2 Sam. vii.) God knew it to be at the bottom of the faithful king's persevering efforts in behalf of the

ark and glory of the Might of Jacob, which is the real expression in the psalm, and a title that the patriarch himself had used (Gen. xlix. 24). The poet seems to point in farther distance to the vision and vow of Jacob at Bethel (Gen. xxviii. 19, 20).

It is in vain, he said to himself and the Lord, that my finished palace offers me welcome, and its ready chambers invite me to rest. Is the servant to dwell at ease when his Master is exposed? May the soldier recline in his well-furnished tent while the Captain has not where to lay His head? (Hag. i. 4, 9). It is too soon to surround myself with royal comfort and splendour. It would be wrong for me to settle quietly in my convenient home without doing the best I can to provide one for the Lord. I will fix on a site as soon as possible, and erect a temporary pavilion for Him with the least delay. Nor have I time for self-indulgence till I shall have prepared and set apart sufficient quantities of gold, silver, brass, iron, cedar timber, precious stones and hewn stones for His permanent temple (2 Sam. viii. 10-12; xxiv. 18-25; 1 Chron. xviii. 11; xxii.; xxviii.; xxix.) "Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the Mighty God of Jacob." As the margin shows, the word is in the plural, "habitations," intimating that there are to be as many apartments in the abode of Jacob's Strength as His orderly and complete worship shall require (1 Chron. xxviii. 11, 12).

Where was the Ark after its surrender by the alarmed Philistines? "Lo!" Amazing isolation of the blessed shrine! It was where the men of Kirjath-jearim deposited it on its rejection by the smitten men of Beth-shemesh. "Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah!" Either, we heard of

its being at Caleb-ephratah, if this was another name for Kirjath-jearim, or, at Bethlehem-ephratah we heard of its situation (1 Chron. ii. 19, 24, 50-54 ; Micah v. 2). When I was a boy at Bethlehem, people spoke of its existence. Not out of mind, it was out of sight of men. I pondered my father Jesse's statements, and thought of it as lost. Learning more about it as I grew older, I became grieved that there was no worship connected with it, with slight exceptions, if any, during the reign of Saul (1 Chron. xiii. 3 ; compare 1 Samuel xiv. 18). Raised to responsibility, I determined to search for the venerable symbol. "We found it in the fields of the wood," or Kirjath-jearim, the forest-city on the hill, nine miles north-west from Jerusalem, where for twenty years it had remained in the house of Abinadab, neglected and forsaken by the nation (1 Sam. vi. 21 ; vii. 1, 2 ; comp. Job xlii. 5 ; Psalm xviii. 44).

From that secluded town, marching with music, we essayed to conduct it to a more central and honourable place. On the uneven way, He Who had afflicted the presumptuous Philistines and too curious Bethshemites, smote rash Uzzah ; and then, fearing that His anger continued against His people, we took the Ark aside into the house of Obed-edom. With him we left it till, after three months, seeing how God blessed him because of it, we recovered our courage, and brought it on with shouting and the sound of the trumpet to the curtained sanctuary we had provided for it on Mount Zion (2 Sam. vi. ; 1 Chron. xiii.) As we came we sang, "We will go into His tabernacles : we will worship at His footstool." Thy footstool we call it, O Lord, because Thou hast touched it with Thy holy feet (1 Chron. xxviii. 2 ; Psalm xcix. 5 ; Isa. lx. 13 ; Lam. ii. 1). It shall no more be misused or deserted. As a nation we take Thee again for our Guest and Ruler, and in connection

with this awful symbol resume Thy perfect service in a new tabernacle. "Arise, O Lord, into Thy rest; Thou, and the Ark of Thy strength." Thou hast shown thereby Thy power, hurling Dagon to the ground, distressing the men of Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron, slaying those of Beth-shemesh, and striking dead the son of Abinadab. Thou art as mighty to save as to destroy, and in Thy favour we shall be secure. We say not now, "Ichabod," but "Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel" (1 Sam. iv. 21; Numb. x. 35, 36). No more will we offend Thee, and Thou wilt punish us no more. "Let Thy priests," unlike the sons of Eli, "be clothed with righteousness; and let Thy saints shout for joy." The glory of Israel is restored!

The king was thus in part relieved of his perpetual mental burden. What he had sworn to do, he had so far, by the help of God, accomplished. The mighty Ark was at home, and Jehovah enthroned between the cherubim; and worshipping Israel rejoiced in the approving presence of his Maker. "And David returned to bless his house" (1 Chron. xvi. 43). With a good conscience, in the name of the Lord, he at last took possession of his waiting palace. Yet he was not wholly contented. "See now," said he, "I dwell in an house of cedar, but the Ark of God dwelleth within curtains" (2 Sam. vii. 2). Jehovah must have a solid temple, with which no edifice should compare, and which should stand for centuries. A man of war, and a shedder of blood, David was not permitted himself to build the holy and beautiful house for the God of Israel. He could only, in the spirit of wisdom, collect and dedicate materials for it, as he did in rich abundance, ready to the hand of Solomon.

The psalm founds a plea upon the fact of Jehovah's acceptance of the fervent wish in the heart of the king "to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the

Lord, and for the footstool of our God" (1 Chron. xxviii. 2). "For thy servant David's sake! Turn not away the face of Thine anointed!" Thou canst not have forgotten the man after Thine own heart, who was so careful and diligent to provide Thee a sanctuary. Does he not live in his descendants? Why in some princely successor is he not holding the sceptre of Thy people? Let not his throne continue vacant. "Lord, remember David!" What the Lord is really asked to remember is the covenant He graciously made with His anointed servant. He recognised his life-long solicitude for His glory, and met it with a promise to perpetuate his house and kingdom. It was so solemn an engagement that, as David is said to have sworn to the Lord, the Lord is represented as having sworn to His servant. "The Lord hath sworn in truth unto David; He will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne." Where is the fulfilment of this covenant? Does it not look as if David's house, like that of Saul, were thrown aside? Can it be that, against His express assurance, the Lord has turned from His emphatic promise? "Lord, where are Thy former lovingkindnesses, which Thou swarest unto David in Thy truth?" "Thou hast cut off and abhorred, Thou hast been wroth with Thine anointed. Thou hast made void the covenant of Thy servant. Thou hast profaned his crown by casting it to the ground" (Psalm lxxxix. 3, 4, 28, 29, 34-39, 49-51; 2 Sam. vii. 11-16; 2 Chron. vi. 41, 42).

When the truth is seen, the complaining ends in reformation and good hope. There was a sad meaning in the degradation of the house of David. The promise had been expressly conditional, and the terms were not fulfilled. Instead of his line having been lost sight of by the Lord, it was God Who had been forgotten by David's family, and

therefore the engagement in an earthly view was void. "If thy children will keep My covenant and My testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore." That was the condition, as the song allows. Could anything be plainer? The sons of David were to hear and serve the Lord. "If they break My statutes, and keep not My commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless My lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer My faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break" (Psalm lxxxix. 30-34). "My mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul" (2 Sam. vii. 14, 15). Suspended as to temporal manifestation and circumstance because of the unfaithfulness of his posterity and people, yet the covenant was not withdrawn; and it was sinful to doubt the promise and oath of Jehovah. As David said, so, in spite of whatever distresses, it must in all generations be confessed to the Lord, "Thy words be true" (2 Sam. vii. 27, 28). There was less excuse for unbelief and despondency in the returned Jews who sang the pilgrim-psalms, than there had been in the captives of Babylon; for God's election of David's family was blended with His choice of Zion, and now, when the holy mountain was recovered, the restoration of the royal house might be confidently anticipated. The God of Israel will no longer "walk in a tent and in a tabernacle" as one in search of a home, but settle in His house on the consecrated mount (2 Sam. vii. 6, 7). "For the Lord hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation. This is My rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints shall shout aloud for joy." The prayer with which the ark was introduced into

its resting-place shall be fully answered. "There will I make the horn of David to bud." Broken off sometimes, his power shall not be rooted up; and however reduced, it shall always sprout again. His kingdom shall never be moved. "My faithfulness and My mercy shall be with him; and in My name shall his horn be exalted" (Psalm lxxxix. 24; Ezek. xxix. 21). "I have ordained a lamp for Mine anointed." Time after time it may burn low, and be almost covered with darkness; but the breath of My Spirit shall rekindle it in goodness and truth, and David shall never want a radiant successor upon his sacred throne (1 Kings xi. 36; xv. 4; Psalm xviii. 28).

It is most evident to Christians, and Jewish authorities have taught, that this is one of the psalms distinctly prophetic of the Messiah. In four places in the writings of the prophets, the Anointed Who was to come is directly called David (Jer. xxx. 9; Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24; xxxvii. 24; Hos. iii. 5). Typified in the son of Jesse, the Lord Jesus is the Great David, Whose meritorious name the true Israel pleads, and in Whose dominion and priesthood is seen the full accomplishment of the prophecy in this inspired song. Let us look through it again, with the recollection of this its highest significance and usefulness.

"Lord, remember David, and all his afflictions." What was the holy solicitude of the typical architect compared with the inward desire and groaning of the Divine Builder Whom the prophets before, during and after David's time, and Whom David himself predicted? As the monarch's life-long idea was to build a material temple for the Lord, so it was the continual thought and endeavour of Jesus Christ to rear a spiritual house; and as David denied himself comforts in pursuing his pious aim, so the only self-indulgence of Immanuel was accomplishing the object for which He came

into the world. He devoted all His days and energies to it, saying, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work," and in His sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection, threw open the palace of the Living God for the reception and salvation of redeemed mankind (1 Tim. iii. 15).

The Church could not well have avoided selecting this song of the ascents as one of the proper psalms for Christmas Day. The spirit of the Christian festival is in the verse, "Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah: we found it in the fields of the wood." It is impossible to read these words without being reminded of the prediction, "Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be Ruler in Israel." Our thoughts turn to the angel-guided shepherds hastening up the hill, so often pressed by the nimble feet of Jesse's ruddy son, to visit the cave-tabernacle of the Infant Messiah, their ears full of the heavenly assurance, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David," the place where David was born, "a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord," the anointed Redeemer and Ruler Whom the renowned monarch and prophet of Israel foreshadowed and described.

"For Thy servant David's sake! Turn not away the face of Thine Anointed!" "Lord, remember David!" That is to say, For the sake of Thy anointed Son, our glorious Saviour! The rabbinical expositors, supposing Solomon behind this thirteenth song of degrees, with reference to the words "for Thy servant David's sake," give the following legend, which will serve as a useful parable. "When Solomon had reached the thirteenth step of the stairs leading up to the Temple, the great gates closed in his face of their own accord, and could not be opened till he had recited

these words, when they flew open again as suddenly and mysteriously as they had closed" (*Littledale*). The key to unlock the doors of mercy is the Redeemer's name. Faith says, "For Jesus Christ's sake!" and they open wide. They are not unfastened, even to a Solomon, if he will not plead, "Through Jesus Christ!" "There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

The interpretation of Jehovah's covenant with David is the gospel of David's Son. "The Lord hath sworn in truth unto David; He will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne." That this promise culminates in the monarch's peerless descendant, Who says, "I am the root and the offspring of David," and of Whose kingdom there will be no end, is manifest from the interruption of reigning sovereigns in David's line, and the final disappearance of his royal house (Rev. xxii. 16). Peter explains that David, "being a prophet," knew "that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne" (Acts ii. 29-31). Adverting to our Saviour's office of Priest as well as King, we find David himself mentioning Jehovah's oath as spoken directly to the Messiah. "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool." "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Psalm cx. 1, 4; Matt. xxii. 43-45; Heb. vii.)

The Lord in this psalm promises to make the horn of David bud, and affirms that He has ordained a lamp for His Anointed. "The Horn of David is the Messiah," a rabbinical authority acknowledges; and another rabbi remarks, "The Lamp is the King who giveth light unto the nations." The

father of John the Baptist, inspired to witness the budding of Christ's kingdom, exclaimed, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath visited and redeemed His people, and hath raised up an Horn of Salvation for us in the house of His servant David; as He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began" (Luke i. 68-70). And thus an evangelist speaks of Jesus Christ:—"The Light shineth in darkness," "the true Light, Which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John i. 5-9).

The concluding words of the psalm speak of the Messiah upon His triumphant and eternal throne. "His enemies will I clothe with shame: but upon Himself shall His crown flourish." David's horn was brought to the dust, and his lamp at last went out; but the might of Christ shall never be reduced, the Sun of Righteousness shall shine for ever. The double crown of our Priest-King, mitre and diadem together, shall flourish in immortal power and glory.

Let not the saint be discouraged in holy purposes. Let not the Church despond. In spite of hindering circumstances, the Lord's people must continue to make His service their chief aim and study. Between what is now and what we wish to be, in regard to religious enjoyment and ecclesiastical position and privilege, there may be as great a contrast as between David flying from Saul and David dancing before the Ark, as great a difference as between that symbol alone and unhonoured in the fields of the wood, and dwelling in the beautiful sanctuary upon Mount Zion; yet our desire to find a resting-place for Him Who chooses our inheritance shall be as surely accomplished as David at length erected a proper tabernacle, and Solomon afterwards built a glorious temple for the Might of Jacob. Our part, as counselled in the two preceding psalms, is to

hope in the Lord, a duty which the present song of the pilgrims shows to be practicable from the fact that God approves and helps our enterprise, that His promise and grace meet our vow and endeavour, that His Eternal Word is incarnate and glorified for our success and salvation.

It is of the highest moment to consider what progress we have made in the life-work of finding a resting-place for Jehovah. Is our piety more than the ark in the hands of the Philistines? Is it as good as the awful symbol secretly accommodated among the trees at Kirjath-jearim? Let us not be satisfied. We may have got back the pride of the tabernacle, and called ourselves the Lord's peculiarly favoured people for twenty years or more or less, and yet have no religion beyond its dormant germ. It is necessary to serve God openly, as David constructed for Him a central and conspicuous sanctuary; to declare our faith in Him publicly, even at the risk of a near relative's disdain or other friend's rebuke, as the happy monarch danced at the head of the procession bringing home the shrine of the testimony; to make room for Him in our dwelling, as Obed-edom did for the footstool of His gracious presence, and offer Him worship in the family, surrender to Him our heart as His chosen and permanent habitation, and live according to His holy commandments. Be it so. "Arise, O Lord, into Thy rest." To the sincere soul He readily responds, "This is My rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it." "If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him" (John xiv. 23). Help us, therefore, precious Saviour, to love Thee truly, and obey Thy sayings. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, live in us.

"O that the Comforter would come!
Nor visit as a transient guest,
But fix in me His constant home,
And take possession of my breast,
And fix in me His loved abode,
The temple of indwelling God!"

O Lord, remember David's care
And study day and night,
And how he to Jehovah sware
For Him a temple to prepare,
And vow'd to Jacob's Might.

My pleasant palace is not mine
While yet the Ark's abroad:
I will not on my couch recline,
My eyes to idle sleep resign,
Till there's a house for God.

Visions of courtly pomp I chase,
Of homely ease dispel,
Till for the Lord I find a place,
And broadly the foundations trace
Where Jacob's Strength may dwell.

At Ephratah, how foes dismayed
Gave back the Ark, we heard:
But of the plight in which it stayed,
Or worship offer'd with its aid,
None ever brought us word.

None seem'd of its estate to know
In camp or court of Saul;
And when we wander'd to and fro
No messenger arrived to show
What might the Ark befall.

When by the grace of God we could,
We search'd the lofty field
Outside the City-of-the-Wood,
Where twenty summers it had stood,
Not ruin'd, but conceal'd.

As forth, with music and with song,
From Kirjath-jearim's wall
We brought the sign and seal along,
Our joy and courage mantled strong,
Till hasty Uzzah's fall.

Then humbled was our forward pride;
We could no farther dare.
But turn'd with trembling steps aside
The awful treasure to confide
To Obed-edom's care.

Three wondrous months his bounteous Guest
The God of mercy proved;
And courage waked in every breast
When we perceived how he was bless'd,
And forth again we moved.

With shouts our joyful course we bent,
And blare of trumpets shrill,
And, dancing to its curtain'd tent,
Before the sacred symbol went
Up Zion's holy hill.

We would within His dwelling come,
And at His footstool pray:
O Lord, accept Thy hallow'd home,
No more, in anger, from us roam,
But here in pity stay.

Arise, O Lord, into Thy rest,
Thy mighty Ark, and Thou;

With righteousness Thy priests be dress'd,
Thy people's joy in shouts express'd:
The Lord be with us now!

No more let pontiff fond forbear
His children to restrain;
No more let priests degraded dare
To revel in the house of prayer,
And holy things profane.

No more let monarch cease to be
Little in his own sight,
No more forget Thy shrine and Thee,
But in success Thy blessing see,
Thy royalty in might.

While thus we touch the ancient string,
May David's echoed lay
Thy servant to remembrance bring;
And, hearing the anointed king,
Turn not his face away.

The Lord Who hath his honour shorn,
Yet to his oath replied,
And in His grace and truth hath sworn,
Thy children shall thy throne adorn,
Thy kingdom shall abide.

My covenant if they obey,
And heed My teaching voice,
Their offspring shall thy sceptre sway,
And never shall the line decay
Of My unchanging choice.

Delight in Zion God doth take,
And will not thence depart:
This is the preference I make,
The rest I never will forsake,
The dwelling of My heart.

As Obed-edom's house I bless'd,
 Zion I will supply;
Its poor shall cease to be distress'd,
Its priests salvation shall invest,
 Its saints for joy shall cry.

I plant a horn for David there
 That shall not fail to sprout;
For Mine Anointed I prepare
A lamp whose light shall be My care,
 And never shall go out.

Him will I clothe with wide renown,
 His enemies with shame:
Before the Son of David's crown
The world shall fear, and saints fall down
 To bless Messiah's name.

XIV.

BROTHERLY UNITY.

"1. Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brethren to dwell together in unity!
2. It is like the precious ointment upon the head,
That ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard:
That went down to the skirts of his garments;
3. As the dew of Hermon,
And as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion:
For there the LORD commanded the blessing,
Even life for evermore."

—PSALM CXXXIII.

THE mention of the father of the priesthood, of the blessing of the Lord, and of Zion, points to a religious assembly on that holy mountain. It may therefore be concluded that the psalm was not written by David on the occasion of his coronation, which took place at Hebron. Nor can we think it was composed for the day when the ark was brought to its resting-place, it being so plainly on record, without this song being named, that in connection with that event David delivered another "into the hand of Asaph and his brethren" (1 Chron. xvi. 7). He may have doubted whether the consolidation of the kingdom was real; but at length, he seems here to say, after such successful seasons of common worship on the hill of Zion, it is impossible not to believe it an accomplished and established fact. We may therefore understand that he produced this sacred and beautiful ode at an early festival after the rescue of the ark from obscurity and dishonour. As the æolian lyre wakes to the wind, the

tuneful heart answers to circumstances. The soul of the royal poet is excited by what he sees, and moved by the Holy Ghost. This great assemblage, abundantly representing all the tribes, speaks a settled order of things. No longer does one man say, "I am of Saul," and another, "I am of David." It is clear that the son of Jesse is now the universally accepted monarch of Israel. For so many years suspicious and afraid of one another, separated, hiding, watching, pursuing, fleeing, contending, the people, from every part of the kingdom, have gathered as brethren together, and will thus meet again three times a year, around the new tabernacle of the ark of the Lord. Enraptured with the eloquent and promising scene, the prophet-king comes forth to take his leading part in the act of national worship, singing himself, and causing the musicians to chant, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"

The hymn was not more appropriate in its original use than in its subsequent repetition. In the festival gatherings of Ephraim and Judah, the sound of it shook the curtains of David's tabernacle so long as it stood, and was echoed by the walls of Solomon's temple till the captivity. It was fit to be softly sung by the rivers of Babylon when the mocking Pagans were not nigh. It helped the exiles to refrain from participation in the idolatries of their Gentile tempters and oppressors. It was a song of thanksgiving that they were yet distinct from the heathen, when they came under the beneficent dominion of Cyrus. What more natural than that its verses should meet his decree of emancipation, when the freed men had to exhort one another to unity of purpose and action? It came to their minds and lips in view of the necessity of travelling in as strong force as possible to the home of their fathers, and

was a song of defiance and hope as they pushed to Jerusalem over deserts and oases, and through alien villages, often in the presence of evil-affected people. It was the very note to strike up when, among the ruins of the holy city and temple, and in the face of surrounding adversaries, so much depended on unanimity and co-operation. At last, when the country was settled again, returning to its ancient and proper service, it was sung by the pilgrims as they journeyed to and from the annual feasts, and chanted by the appointed musicians before the altars of Zion.

Inspired for permanent use in the Church, was it not a favourite with the apostles? The voice of Gentiles joined that of Jews in repeating it around the cross of the world's Redeemer; and it has ever since been used by Christians. Evangelistic alliances and undertakings find in it a bond and an expression. Believers from all lands continue it up to the door of the imperishable temple, and in its spirit mingle for ever with the countless hosts of saints and angels who worship God in the cloudless glory of Zion's eternal hill.

"Behold!" says the psalm. Here is a spectacle worthy of contemplation, an impressive illustration of the brotherhood of mankind, a splendid demonstration of the beauty and advantage of fraternal affection and concord. Men are brethren as created by God. "Have we not all one Father? hath not one God created us?" (Mal. ii. 10). "In Him we live, and move, and have our being . . . we are His offspring" (Acts xvii. 28, 29). As descended from the same progenitor, Noah, Adam, men are brethren. God "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts xvii. 26). Brethren men are, as sons of the same mother earth. As the cloud is born from the sea, and returns to it, so shalt "thou return

unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. iii. 19). One army of clouds succeeds another: the ocean that gave them birth remains unaltered. So "one generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever" (Eccles. i. 4). Land and sea, birth and death, tell us that kings, nobles, and commons, Greeks and barbarians, masters and menials, bond and free, are all brethren. "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Tim. vi. 7). To the grave fall the flower of beauty and the ordinary grass, the eagle of pride and the tiny insect, the demure philosopher and the laughing fool, "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust." "The small and great are there; and the servant is free from his master" (Job iii. 19).

Men are brethren when they belong to the same tribe or nation. As descendants of Israel, and distinct from other people, they were such of whom the psalm is spoken. When Englishmen meet in foreign lands, they cordially salute one another as brethren. When of the same faith, men are brethren, especially, whether Jews or Gentiles, Britons or Hindus, those who believe in the same Redeemer, receive the same Holy Spirit, and worship the same God and Father. As the Old Testament calls the Israelites, the New Testament calls Christians, *Brethren*. Our risen Lord is "the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. viii. 29). Jesus remarked to His disciples, "All ye are brethren" (Matt. xxiii. 8). The Apostle says, "Because ye are sons" of God, therefore brethren to one another, "God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. iv. 6; Rom. viii. 15, 16). From all His people everywhere, whatever their distinctions of nationality, polity and creed, He hears the same prayer, which He

Himself has taught them: "Our Father, Which art in heaven." In their documents, meetings, correspondence, conversation, books, and in their hearts, being the kindred of the Lord Jesus and the family of God, Christians should call one another *Brethren.*

The song recognizes the duty of brotherly unity. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." The Church is essentially one. "Ye are all one in Christ Jesus;" one city, "fellow-citizens with the saints;" "one fold" under "one Shepherd;" one temple, "a holy temple in the Lord," "an habitation of God through the Spirit;" one family, "the household of God;" "one bread, and one body," one body as the bread is one, "by one Spirit all baptized into one body," "all made to drink into one Spirit," "one body, and one Spirit," "one body," of which Christ is "the Head," "one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (John x. 16; Rom. xii. 5; 1 Cor. x. 17; xii. 12, 13; Gal. iii. 28; Eph. ii. 19, 21, 22; iv. 4; v. 23, 30; Col. i. 18, 24).

The apostles teach that the unity of Christian believers manifests itself in their mutual forbearance, their standing by one another and the common Master, their kindly and zealous communion, combination, co-operation. "I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. i. 10). "Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous" (1 Peter iii. 8). "Forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. iv. 2, 3). "Standing fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel" (Phil. i. 27; ii. 2; Rom.

xii. 16; 2 Cor. xiii. 11). "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother" (1 John iii. 10-12). Not as the herdsmen of Abram and Lot, striving instead of dwelling together, forgetting that they were brethren; not as Jacob, supplanting Esau; not as Esau, vowing vengeance against Jacob; not as Joseph's brothers, selling him into bondage; not as the fratricides Absalom and Jehoram; not as the two brothers, one of whom said to the Lord Jesus, "Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me." Brethren in blood or in the Lord must confide one in another, consult one another, help one another, work together, as did Moses and Aaron, Jonathan and David, John and James, Peter and Andrew, Paul and Timothy, John and Charles Wesley. Injuring one another, disputing together, envy, jealousy, and even too much shyness, are incompatible with pious unity. This is "no new commandment, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning," not only, as the apostle particularly means, from the beginning of the day of Christ, but from the time when the Psalms were written, and all preceding time.

All the divisions in the Church are not sinful and needless. Knowing that there must be greater unity and power for orderly and politic separation as in an effective army, and that friendly competition is often of signal advantage for results; considering the degrees of capacity and development in men, the bias of relationship and education, the innocent differences that exist in habits and opinions, preferences and tastes, and the duty of children walking as closely as

possible in the ways of their parents; and remembering the sovereignty of God in His creation and use of agencies as in all things else, we should guard against too seriously and bitterly lamenting that the camp of Israel is disposed in tribes. "The body is not one member, but many." In the house of Him to Whom the hearts of all Christians say "Our Father," "are many mansions," on earth as in heaven; and yet it is one beautiful and glorious whole, and the occupants of its numerous courts and sanctuaries are one loving household. He Who "seeth not as man seeth," withholds from none of the sects His Holy Spirit. Man makes much of dress and manner: our Heavenly Father delights in the reflection of His moral image. As families, after having been lawfully and providentially apart, reunite in unabated love at Christmas, so brethren in the Lord who in the order of Divine arrangement have been busily occupied in their respective denominations rejoice and work together in periodical festivals, evangelical associations and revival missions. The people have been at home, and variously engaged, some in one part of the country, and some in another; but all of them have continued to look to the same holy city of God, and when the season comes round, travel thither from every quarter, and gladly meet and mingle in the common temple. Soul is linked with soul in Christ, society with society, province with province. Never with more reason was more heart than now thrown into the song of David and the pilgrims, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"

"Love, like death, hath all destroyed,
Rendered all distinctions void;
Names and sects and parties fall:
Thou, O Christ, art all in all."

O that there were no blots on the picture! Alas that the conduct of the disciples of Christ does not fully agree with their theory! that all their practice is not in accordance with their profession! While it is sometimes right and necessary for them to dispose themselves according to inevitable peculiarities, who does not know that there are peculiarities dividing them which were never inevitable, which ought to have been avoided, and which it is their duty to abolish? When they should be taking down walls of partition between them, filling up moats of jealous separation, levelling or boring mountains of division, making crooked ways straight and rough places plain for the convenience of all true believers, the people of the Lord have still their shamefully rival parties. Churches side by side mingle with the world rather than with each other. This looks with an angry eye on that, erects huge barriers against it, bids it stern defiance. The bridge is down and the gate wide open for the worldly and ungodly; but there is no admission for a good Christian, because a member of a different denomination! There are churches whose only meeting is beneath the surface, not in unity, but in enmity, each intent upon undermining the foundation of the other.

Not only does Ephraim envy Judah and Judah vex Ephraim,—the tribes and congregations of Israel are often in themselves disunited. One member of a society says to another, "I have no need of thee." One proclaims, "I am of Paul;" another, "I am of Apollos;" another, "I am of Cephas;" another, with more presumptuous affectation, "I am of Christ." Good people in one pew are at bitter feud with the equally reputable occupants of the seats adjoining. The pious ladies Euodias and Syntyche, to the grief of the apostle, have a standing quarrel. David's own brothers scornfully question his motives when he proposes to meet

the Philistine. Hundreds desire the promotion of God's glory in no way but their own, and burn with zeal for Christ against each other. The psalm, used now with more propriety than formerly, will be sung with greater correctness hereafter than now.

Many a man has his panacea for the Church's ills. It would be well if there were more enthusiasts for brotherly unity as the remedy of them all. It is neither "good" without being pleasant, nor "pleasant" without being good, but both good in itself and pleasant to be seen. "It is like the precious ointment" which, by Divine direction, consisted of pure myrrh, sweet cinnamon, sweet calamus, cassia, and oil olive, and was never to be prepared for the anointing of any other personage than the high-priest (Exod. xxx. 22-33). The rabbis said that the only quantity ever made was that compounded under the direction of Moses, and that the original mixture was not exhausted by successive consecrations until the captivity; and they therefore distinguished the high-priests before the captivity as the "high-priests anointed." That "holy anointing oil" was not more precious than is brotherly unity, which it symbolised less in its sacredness, costliness, and perfume, than in its diffusion. "The crown of the anointing oil of his God" was "upon the head" of Aaron, covering in idea his whole person (Exod. xxix. 7; Lev. viii. 12; xxi. 10, 12). The dwelling together of brethren in unity "is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, that," oil or beard, "went down to the skirts of his garments," the mouth of them, their upper edge or hem, flowing above and upon the breastplate that contained the names of the twelve tribes, thus spreading in symbol over the high-priest's whole apparel to its lowest border, and typifying the consecration to the Lord of all the children of Israel.

The name Aaron meaning "mountainous," it is not surprising that unity is spoken of next "as the dew of Hermon that descended upon the mountains of Zion." (The words "*and as the dew*," printed in italic letters, are not contained in the psalm.) It is not only dew in the scientific sense which is here intended, but vapour and small rain. (Deut. xxxiii. 28; Prov. iii. 20.) Like the shining oil on the head is the snow that caps the northern mountain, whence the Jordan flows to the thirsty southern lands, and a cool air spreads to Zion, yielding to the warmer region soft mists and gentle showers without which it would be parched and barren. "For there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore."

The heart bleeds to behold brethren disunited; but there is joy in being able to say, "See how these Christians love one another!" They could not have true happiness without brotherly unity, and in unity they cannot help being happy. "To be together in place, and not in mind, is punishment; to be together in mind, and not in place, is goodness; to be together in mind and place, is happiness" (*Hugo Victorin*, quoted by Littledale). "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" It is pleasant as the fragrant oil, lovely as the glistening dew, delightful as a view of the green and fruitful hill. How joyful to the brethren themselves! As a refreshing application, and because used on festal occasions, oil came to be regarded as an emblem of gladness. When David would express his happiness in the Lord, he said, "Thou anointest my head with oil." Unity is a continual feast. "It is like the precious ointment," "the oil of joy," "the oil of gladness." It is as the pearly dew. How profitable it is! The maxim of the adversary, who assailed Eve when away from Adam, seems to have been from the beginning, "Divide and

conquer." "Two are better than one." "Two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Eccles. iv. 9, 12). The loose hemp may be scattered by the hand of a child, or by the playful wind: the twisted cable holds the ship to its anchor. "Union is strength." It can laugh at the Samaritans. It is victory, success, and prosperity. The Lord withholds His blessing—the dew, the unction, life, fertility, beauty—from a Church like a mountain of riven rock, forbidding in aspect, stripped for conflict, lifting against one another its many frowning heads.

The song suggests the secret of brotherly unity. Zion and Hermon may be taken as symbolising the Church of Jews and Gentiles; Aaron represents Jesus Christ; and the dew and the oil typify the Holy Spirit. "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power." (Acts x. 38; Psalm xlv. 7; Dan. ix. 24; Luke iii. 21, 22; iv. 17-21.) Jesus thé Anointed is His name: the Bible calls Him, and we call Him, Jesus Christ. The precious ointment is "upon the Head," the Church's Head. It is said "that the manner in which the Jews anointed the head of their high-priest was in the form of a St. Andrew's Cross (X) on the crown and also on the forehead, foreshadowing the altar on which the one true High Priest should offer the great atonement" (*Littledale*). Our High Priest Jesus Christ is the fountain and centre of brotherly unity. As the anointing of Aaron was for all Israel, so the Holy Ghost, descending upon the Lord Jesus, descends upon the Christian ministry and the whole Christian Church. From Him the Spirit falls upon presbyters, deacons and people; upon our Conference, Circuits, and entire Connexion.

> "Forth from our Head the blessing goes,
> And all His seamless coat o'erflows."

The appearance of the multitude on Zion's hill reminded David of the oil on Aaron's head and the dew from Hermon's brow. They who thus gathered about their earthly monarch, and crowded around the ark of the Lord, would, like the melting snow and flowing oil, thence spread themselves in holy influence all over the consolidated kingdom. Not Aaron only, David also is a type of our Redeemer. Jesus is King, as well as Priest. Led by the Spirit, as all turned to David, and with him worshipped round the tabernacle, so must we press towards our Saviour's presence as a common centre, and meet under His royal banner of the cross. Christ's name in Greek begins with the sign of the cross, with the letter which became "the chief standard of the empire" (*Littledale*). What have they to do with this holy symbol, the weapons of whose warfare are carnal? The Cross is the banner of the conquering Church, attracting Christians nearer to one another. It was our happiness to be a witness when the Holy Spirit brought close beneath the shadow of the Cross the General Conference of the churches assembled in London a generation ago; and we shall never forget the moment when, under His influence, the doctrinal basis having been agreed upon, and the Evangelical Alliance thereby constituted, brother shook hands with brother, and the whole assembly sang,—

"All hail the power of Jesu's name;
Let angels prostrate fall;
Bring forth the royal diadem
To crown Him Lord of all."

The oneness of the Church is its possession and government by the Spirit of our common Head. If we would have brotherly unity, we must share in the anointing of the Holy Ghost. Like oil on the brow or dew on the mountain must

His grace descend. Like perfumes in the ointment must His gifts be concentrated and combined. The schisms of the Church will never be entirely healed until the promise be perfectly fulfilled, "I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh" (Joel ii. 28). O Lord our Saviour, how may we obtain this unction of heavenly love? "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" (Luke xi. 13). Trusting in Jesus Christ, we must pray for the Comforter. In our Master's name, like the disciples in the upper room, we must wait for the promise of the Father and the Son. There is a uniting power in prayer. It is the Holy Ghost urging brethren together to the mercy-seat. They bow before the same Spirit that "bloweth where it listeth." The prayer inwrought by Him, "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." "Praying in the Holy Ghost," "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit," is the plan to "keep ourselves in the love of God." It is impossible to continue in the right path without His aid. "The way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." Our Helper before the Almighty is our Helper by the side of our neighbour. Power to pray, love to God and man, growth in grace, fruitfulness in good works, success in sacred effort, perpetual and final victory over the three-fold enemy, all is from the Spirit of the Father and the Son. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Let brethren feel their dependence upon the Lord, look to Jesus Christ, trust in His cross, use the grace God gives them, pray and wait for the Comforter, expect and receive the Holy Ghost. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings

in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. i. 3). "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. xv. 5, 6).

O happiness to see!
O joyful tale to tell!
In loving unity
Together brethren dwell:
How good and pleasant is the sight!
Not less the profit than delight!

'Tis bad, with souls apart,
When face encounters face;
Good, when they join in heart
Who cannot meet in place;
Best, both in body and in mind,
A common ground when brethren find.

Discordant until now,
Their blended voices sing
On Zion's shining brow
United Israel's King;
And when the people homeward go,
The blessing will but overflow.

Like oil upon the head,
A benison for all,
Down Aaron's beard that spread,
Upon his robe to fall,
The fragrance will reach everywhere,
The precious ointment all will share.

So Hermon's fruitful rain
On Galilee descends,
And bounteous through the plain
The high-born river wends,

And the proceeding dews distil
That freshen Zion's grateful hill.

Jehovah from above
 Doth there the Spirit pour
Of all-baptizing love,
 E'en life for evermore:
Diffusive from the Church's Head,
O'er all the Christian world 'twill spread.

XV.

PASTORS AND PEOPLE.

"1. Behold, bless ye the LORD,
All ye servants of the LORD,
Which by night stand in the house of the LORD.
2. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary,
And bless the LORD.
3. The LORD that made heaven and earth
Bless thee out of Zion."

—PSALM CXXXIV.

IT seems unnecessary, and is perhaps impossible, to determine whether this last of the fifteen Songs of Degrees was meant for the pilgrims on their arrival at the Temple, or when they appeared within its courts, or on their departure from its sacred threshold. Adapted to particular occasions, yet it was not unfit for repetition anywhere, outside or within Jehovah's dwelling-place, on the road to or from Jerusalem, with the lips or only in the mind. It includes a greeting and a reply. An exhortation to ministerial duty, expressing encouragement and approval, is answered by an affectionate benediction. As the two commandments of our Lord condense the law, this brief dramatic song is a summary of worship. It is capable of being used, like those preceding, as a heart-picture and private meditation by the individual worshipper, and also as a social chant by any devout and musical two or three. If we regard it as an order of united religious service, it opens with the voice of the people, or the chief singers or other leaders who repre-

sent them, calling upon the ministers waiting in the Temple for the purpose of conducting its continual exercises, to praise the Lord and pray for the nation. "Behold, bless ye the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord, which by night stand in the house of the Lord. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary," or, "to the sanctuary, and bless the Lord." Pray and praise towards the most holy place where the ark of the covenant and the cherubim of glory contain the mercy-seat. Then a response from the Temple addresses the congregation in the singular number. "The Lord that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion,"—thee, O people of Israel,—thee, individual Israelite. In this reply there is a voice higher than that of common Levitical officers. It was the prerogative of the chief priests to bless the children of Israel in Jehovah's name. There is evidently a reference to the benediction appointed to be pronounced upon the Israelites by Aaron and his sons and successors, in which, when speaking to "them," they were to say "thee." "On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace" (Numb. vi. 23-26). In allusion to the same benediction, it is similarly said in a previous pilgrim-song to "every one that feareth the Lord," "The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion" (Psalm cxxviii. 1, 5). Thus the psalter of the pilgrims ends, as one is disposed to think it ought, with the voice of blessing.

As among the Israelites a distinct priesthood was indispensable, so is a separate ministry for Christians; but in the nature of things it was always intended that there should be sympathy between the Lord's Temple-servants and the mass of His people. If the priests and the pilgrims were

not widely sundered in the kingdom of Israel, much less is there a gulf between clerics and laics in the Church of Jesus Christ. It will be well, with the guidance of this psalm, to advert to some of the relative features and duties of Christian pastors and those with, to and for whom they minister. We will first state what the Lord's congregation may desire and exhort their ministers to be; in other words, what ministers should aim at being; and then what God's messengers and servants are entitled to look for in such as join in the responses of public worship, or make their voices heard in ecclesiastical councils.

It is to be expected of ministers that with humble gladness they deem themselves, and show that they wish to be considered, "servants of the Lord." They are also servants of the Church,—"your servants for Jesus' sake;" ministers of Christ's people in so far as they are Christ's ministers (2 Cor. iv. 5). But they may no more follow the will of men, as if blind slaves to the congregation, than their own independent will, "as being lords over God's heritage" (1 Peter v. 3). It must be their great concern to ascertain, obey and teach the will of their Supreme Master. Their duty is to enquire of Him before and above all, as did Saul of Tarsus, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Having received Divine instruction, they must, in a becoming spirit and manner, fearless of consequences, speak and act accordingly. "Let a man," says St. Paul, "so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. But with me it is," not in itself and in results a small thing, but comparatively "a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. He that judgeth me is the Lord" (1 Cor. iv. 1-4; 2 Tim. ii. 3; 1 Peter iv. 10). If

Christ's servants, and for His sake ours, say or do what at the moment we dislike, we are not hastily to pass sentence upon them, but seriously to ask ourselves if they are obeying the Head of the Church in the matter. Whether we are at first gratified or not, never must we complain when we discover that they are faithful to the Lord. It is in serving Him that they are truly serving us.

At times understood and agreed upon, ministers must be expected to conduct worship for and with the congregation. For that, as for other purposes, they are employed by God and supported by the Church. They are bad servants of Christ and His people, if they do not "by night stand in the house of the Lord," when required to do so, and are not to be found there at their post in the morning. There were duties of guardianship and preparation to be attended to in the Temple, and occasional religious exercises to be observed in the midst of its altars, from sunset to sunrise (1 Chron. ix. 27-33; Isa. xxx. 29). In the present age such nocturnal occupations are unnecessary; but there must be the same readiness of spirit and faithfulness to vocation as in the olden time. It is necessary for the servants of the Lord to be in their places at the appointed hours of worship, whether in the forenoon or the evening or whatever determined part of the day. With faithful ministers it is a point of honour and conscience punctually to keep their engagements. Unforeseen official calls of a commanding nature may excuse their absence from particular services, or they may be disabled by bodily sickness; but they must never presume needlessly to depart from a prepared and accepted programme.

Christian ministers are more than preachers. Their work is to pray and praise as well as preach. Officiating in public, they must not reduce the prayer or the hymn, much

less the Scripture lessons, to make room for what they desire to say. If they shorten anything, it should be the sermon. A praying pastor is better than a prayerless preacher. Standing was an attitude of devotion; and the uplifting of the hands, among both Israelites and Gentiles, was an expression of adoration and supplication. (Exod. ix. 29; xvii. 11, 12; 1 Kings viii. 54; Psalm lxiii. 4.) "Behold, bless ye the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord, which by night stand in the house of the Lord. Lift up your hands to the sanctuary, and bless the Lord." His servants must deserve to be relied upon to offer praise to Him on behalf of the people, and to intercede for their welfare and salvation. They are not at liberty to sit down in the Temple now and then, as if, so far from being under obligation to conduct divine service throughout and to the end, they had occasionally not to take any part in it, but might leave it for a time to the congregation. It is their duty, before and with the singers and the rest of the people, when the Lord is being praised or petitioned, to use appropriate attitudes of worship. Not in themselves of saving efficacy, yet outward regulations and postures are necessary to the decency and usefulness of united religious exercises. The sign, without being trusted in, is to be observed; lest the thing signified, of infinitely more importance, should be missed or neglected. A sign of devotion is lifting the hands: lifting the heart is the thing so signified. Such a sign may be displaced by another more convenient and equally scriptural: the thing signified cannot be superseded. He deals in vain repetitions, however perfect his ritual, who does not lift up his heart when professing to pray or praise. "Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens" (Lam. iii. 41).

Ministers are bound to declare on what conditions the

Lord dispenses His benefits, and on what understanding they invoke His mercies. A lesson of the psalm is that He is gracious to those by whom He is remembered and glorified. The priest replies to the children of Israel, "The Lord that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion." Despair not. Be re-assured. Be glad. He only can bless thee. Pastors and people encourage themselves and one another to trust in the Creator. They find solace in the recollection that the springs of the universe are at God's command. As stated in two previous pilgrim-songs, He on Whom they rely "made heaven and earth," and can therefore do for His worshippers whatever He pleases; and they know that He is as able as ready to console and deliver (Psalm cxxi. 2; cxxiv. 8). Delighting to repeat this truth, they confidently appear before their Maker in Zion. What promises of relief are so satisfactory as those expounded in His holy mountain? Of all men they are richest and freest who are wont to receive His blessing in His dwelling-place; and true ministers are never more happily occupied than when proclaiming in the Temple His redeeming mercy. They are careful to honour the Source and Giver of good, not saying, "We absolve thee," but, "He pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe His holy Gospel." Their answer is not, "We bless thee," but, "The Lord that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion." These words are an expression of brotherly sympathy, a declaration of faith in God's promises, a preaching of salvation by His grace, an invitation to depend on His offered mercy, and an invocation of His immediate succour, without any pretence of personal or official prerogative to bestow or withhold the blessing of the Almighty. Pastors themselves need His blessing, and obtain it on the same footing as others. (Acts xx. 32; 2 Cor. vi. 1.)

In the light of the New Testament, it is to be insisted that ministers serve God and the people in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Lift up your hands to the sanctuary." Before the veil of it was "the golden censer" or altar of incense, and within the most holy place "the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant, and over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy-seat" (Heb. ix. 4, 5; Exod. xxx. 6-10; Lev. xvi. 11). All this was typical of the merit and priesthood of the Messiah. For Him ministers speak to their fellow-creatures, and through Him to the Almighty Creator. A prayer without Christ is mockery of God: a sermon without Christ is mockery of man. In saving intercourse between earth and heaven, the Redeemer, Who made both, is all in all. (John i. 3; Acts iv. 12; xx. 20, 21; 1 Cor. ii. 2; 2 Cor. iv. 5; Eph. ii. 18; Col. i. 28; 1 Tim. ii. 5-7.) When pastors cry for and with us to Jehovah, let them plead the precious blood of the Lamb. When they address us as God's servants and ours, let them set forth the Gospel of His incarnate Son. Whether on their knees or upon their feet, let them say before the Lord,

"My heart is full of Christ, and longs
Its glorious matter to declare!
Of Him I make my loftier songs,
I cannot from His praise forbear;
My ready tongue makes haste to sing
The glories of my Heavenly King."

The servants of the Lord and of His people are to learn and teach out of the lively oracles. Meaning this too, the congregation say, "Lift up your hands to the sanctuary." It covered the ark; and the ark contained the Law, towards which the cherubim bent, desiring to look into its revelations

(1 Peter i. 12), and over which Jehovah shone and spoke, the Light and Voice of the record, His own interpreter. Let our pastors, like Moses, go into the tabernacle, in obedience to God's command, to open to Him their minds, and hear Him, according to His promise, speak from off the mercy-seat. (Exod. xxv. 22; Numb. vii. 89). Let them "search the Scriptures" of the covenant in the presence and with the inspiration of the covenant-keeping God. "Lift up your hands to the sanctuary," and the Lord of the Temple will put into them, and into your hearts, His law. Consult the sacred page with prayer to its Author, that the Bible may instruct you, and you may give us its lessons. Praying is listening, as well as addressing; and God makes His will known to and by those who, opening and using the inspired volume, wait before His footstool with attention. He commands the devout minister, "Thou shalt speak My words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear" (Ezek. ii. 7). They who hear are still inclined to do so, and in this psalm express their wish for repeated opportunities to listen to God's law. The New Testament follows the Old in requiring His servants to "hold fast the form of sound words," and, "rightly dividing the word of truth," "speak the things which become sound doctrine" (2 Tim. i. 13; ii. 15; iii. 16, 17; Titus ii. 1). Their reply is: "We are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God, speak we in Christ" (2 Cor. ii. 17). "Not handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Cor. iv. 2). Prayerfully studying and sincerely expounding His will, we say with affection and confidence to everyone by whom it is revered and accepted, "The Lord that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion."

The address in the psalm implies a call upon ministers to speak in their lives what they say with their lips, and be themselves the blessing they pronounce. The margin reads, "Lift up your hands in holiness." "Cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye" (Luke vi. 42). "Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. iv. 12). Merit the title we give you of "servants of the Lord." Deserve, as far as possible, to praise Jehovah for the congregation, and in His name to bless His people. Be the voice of the Church in obeying the Lord as well as praying to Him, and the voice of God in exemplifying as well as repeating His commandments. You are scarcely fit to say, "The Lord that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion," unless able to exhort, "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample" (Phil. iii. 17). Aim at usefulness during your life that shall last after your death. (Heb. xi. 4; xiii. 7.) Let your hands be clean. Let your hearts be pure. "I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (1 Tim. ii. 8). "I will wash mine hands in innocency: so will I compass Thine altar, O Lord" (Psalm xxvi. 6).

What the people of God require their pastors to be and do, they aim at for themselves in prayer and practice. Language like this in the psalm, addressed to the Lord's servants in the place "where prayer is wont to be made," implies the possession of a praying spirit, and an engagement to offer prayer. They who desire their ministers to lift up their hands and hearts to the Lord must not only be able to say "Amen" to their intercessions and benedictions, but give them opportunities before the throne of grace to endorse

their own good wishes and petitions. No pastors are more happy and successful than those who are remembered by their believing hearers and neighbours at the footstool of the Father of mercies. Even apostles sought, much more have their successors cause to beg, to be prayed for by the brethren. (Rom. xv. 30; 2 Cor. i. 11; Eph. vi. 19; 1 Thess. v. 25; 2 Thess. iii. 1.) Let them be prayed for in our hearts that they may be what, in the words contained in this song, and in similar language, we desire they should be; that they may be "servants of the Lord," not in profession and office only, but in disposition, deed and truth; that they may not mock God nor trifle with souls in the Temple, but stand or kneel with reverence, and use the sacred time to profit; that they may ever have their minds in tune for invoking the Most High, whether in adoration or supplication; that in their dealing with men they may faithfully preach the Gospel, administer the sacraments, and keep to discipline; that in all their efforts to do good they may honour, enjoy and show God's saving kindness; that in their ministrations Jesus Christ may be first, last, midst and without end; that they may love the Holy Bible, have the Divine Spirit's help in studying it, and be enabled to distribute its exhaustless treasures; that they may be "righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless" (Luke i. 6). Thank God, perhaps no persons are more frequently and earnestly remembered in the intercessions of the faithful than Christ's ministers. If the fact burdens them with an additional responsibility, it yields them a substantial comfort. It pours into their spirits a Divine balm, and brings God's blessing upon their endeavours. Trembling at the added accountability, yet rejoicing in the augmented grace, they not only respond "Amen," but sing in their hearts "Hallelujah!" And they do not fail to

offer more fervent prayer on behalf of the interceding people, and to say to them with increased attachment, in benediction reciprocated by every saint in the congregation, "The Lord that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion."

We cannot turn our wishes and counsels into prayer without also, in our relation and degree, turning them into practice. The psalm implies that all who use it, in the spirit of it, people as well as pastors, are servants of the Lord; and in nearly every respect the duty of ministers of religion exhibits that of their fellow-worshippers. They to whom it would be an offence to come to the house of prayer and see no pastor present, should not think it a trifling matter for the service to be begun before their arrival. They ought to be present, if they can, at the first moment, in order not to hinder any, and not to mock the Lord, and for their own sake, and to encourage the minister and the other worshippers. All should be in time for concurrent confession, prayer, praise and Scripture-reading. The service is one and gradual, each part of it leading to another, and no constituent to be willingly omitted. It is a Song of Ascents. It is a flight of fifteen steps. When Christians "agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask," they have the good "done for them of" their Heavenly Father (Matt. xviii. 19). Rush after and spring into a train in motion, and you may merrily reach the terminus; but the want of punctuality is scarcely less discreditable and dangerous in a passenger than it would be in the conductor. Frequent the house of the Lord to worship at His feet, and to receive His blessing. As the song tells you, it is the place in which to obtain instruction, relief and salvation. But do not leave the Bible with the preacher. Make it your own book of research and devotion. While you employ him to dig gold for you, test the teaching he offers. "Receive

the word with all readiness of mind, and search the Scriptures daily, whether those things are so" (Acts xvii. 11). And not only in the worship of the Temple and the reading of the sacred volume, but in the cleanness of your hands, in the purity of your hearts, in the holiness of your lives, be as consistent as you would have your ministers.

In the first of the Songs of Degrees we saw the people of the Lord sojourning in Mesech, and dwelling in the tents of Kedar. In the last we behold them in the tabernacle of the Almighty, safely arrived at home. On the highest of the steps between the courts of the Temple, looking on the priestly ministers whose level we have gained, and over the crowd of men, women and children below, we are again cheered with the good and pleasant spectacle of unity celebrated in the preceding psalm. The fellow-sinners that were, are fellow-saints. The many members are one body. The word of the Lord is fulfilled: "And they shall put My name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them" (Numb. vi. 27). Into His one name and Spirit all are baptized, and He Himself is the Priest Who speaks the blessing. The voice is that which says, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (John xiv. 6). Propitiated Deity and reclaimed man meet in Christ. In His priesthood, the loving Father welcomes the returned prodigal, and earth and heaven embrace each other. The Saviour God fills the Temple and the heart; and every saint finds in Him his place and share in the Church's unity. To every one who has ears to hear, and a heart that believes, the word is spoken: "The Lord that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion." Thee! The common address is personal. The blessing for all is for each. It is for thee and me, dear brother.

Now to the Lord for Whom praise is desired in the psalm

which has guided our concluding meditations, the God of Israel, the Giver of the Law, the Author of the Gospel, Who has inspired the Church with the Songs of Ascents, and by Whose grace we have aimed to accomplish the fifteen Degrees, Who found us trembling in the desert, and has brought us to the tranquil summit of mount Zion, Jehovah, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, Whose we are, Whom we serve, and Whom we humbly hope to worship in His heavenly Temple, be glory ascribed by all Churches while they last, and all hearts for ever and for ever. Amen.

Ye servants of the Lord,
 Extol His holy name;
His worship your reward,
 His glory be your aim.

Ye servants of His Church,
 Renew your solemn lays;
For us the law ye search,
 And offer prayer and praise.

The grateful strain prolong,
 And holy vigils keep;
Sing with the stars your song,
 Whoever else may sleep.

Still in the Temple stand,
 And guard our sacred light;
Spread every holy hand,
 And consecrate the night.

For mercy's dazzling gift,
 Before Jehovah's seat
Your arms of faith uplift,
 Your chant of love repeat.

The watching Lord will turn
 Your darkness into day ;
And we from you shall learn
 Both how to praise and pray.

When so with one accord
 The saints of Israel cry,
The servants of the Lord
 To each and all reply :—

Ready and strong to aid,
 The Lord our Righteousness,
Who earth and heaven made,
 Thee out of Zion bless !

By services we give
 In priestly work and word,
And by the lives we live,
 His blessing be conferr'd !

And be thou from the Throne
 Directly heard and bless'd,
In worship of thy own
 With ours to God address'd.

Spreading our hands abroad,
 Heav'n's voice and earth's are we ;
Our prayer is Christ's to God,
 His blessing ours to thee.

People and priests in one,
 Let all the Church adore
The Father and the Son
 And Spirit evermore.

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